

Language Use and Literary Meaning: A Study of Linguistic and Stylistic

Realisation of Theme in Wole Soyinka's The Interpreters

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Mr Alex Rodger,
former Head, Department of English Studies (Foreign Students),
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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis was planned and written by myself
and not in co-operation with any other person.

ABSTRACT

This study of Wole Soyinka's The Interpreters, which is carried out against the background of literary-stylistic theory, demonstrates that the novel is coherent in certain ways in spite of the structural eccentricities it exhibits. Thus, while on the one hand Soyinka as implied author has disrupted the chronological coherence of the novel, he has on the other established certain patterns of coherence in the text. This coherence, or communicative cohesion, of the novel is realised through the foregrounding of certain thematically significant motifs. These motifs sub-divide into two main classes in relation to the discursual point of view manifested in the novel - that is, Soyinka's attitude to the two main groups of characters portrayed in the text: (a) the Board members in Lagos, the politicians, and the intellectuals in Ibadan on the one hand; and (b) the five interpreters, who are the central characters, on the other. The first class of motifs - consisting of the filth, the Voidancy philosophy, the black oyinbo, the living death, the petrified brain and the dripping oil motifs - is used to realise the futility of the society depicted in the novel, which is embodied by the first group of characters referred to above, who are thus the satirised characters. This means that Soyinka's attitude to those characters is negative. By contrast, however, his attitude to the interpreters is much more positive: he uses the creek-surface, the apostasy, the floods, the drowning and the darkness motifs to realise stylistically their dilemma and their confusion. One effect of the use of all these motifs is that certain lexical items also assume significance in the novel. Thus, the lexical items in the "filth" set collocate, thematically, with those in the "politics" set and the "death" set to reinforce the filth and other, related motifs in the text. In a similar sort of way, lexical items such as creek-surface, apostasy, apostate, floods, darkness, rise, rising and so on, also collocate from the point of view of the portrayal of the interpreters in the novel. But it is not only between lexical items that we can establish collocational relationships in the text, for certain metaphors and symbolic motifs also do enter into the collocational sets mentioned above. It is by examining The Interpreters in the way outlined above that the general reader as well as the student and the critic can distinguish between those linguistic and literary patterns which acquire significance in the novel and those that do not. Their making this distinction enables them to respond to the text in an appropriate way.

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INTRODUCTION

My aim in this study of the The Interpreters is to describe in a systematic manner the pattern of coherence that emerges from it. Since the novel was first published by Andre Deutsch in 1965, it has received a mixed reaction from readers and critics alike: many people cannot understand it because it is "too difficult"; yet they hail it as a major literary achievement. Even those people who claim to understand it (who, invariably, are critics) have not been able to describe their responses to it in a coherent and illuminating manner, in a manner that could guide the general reader or the student to shape his own responses to it in an appropriate way.

The approach adopted in this study is that of literary stylistics. By literary stylistics is meant that method of literary interpretation which seeks to study "language as used in literary texts with the aim of relating it to its artistic functions" (Leech and Short, 1981:15). This approach also seeks to bring to bear on literary interpretation the use of the descriptive tools of linguistics: relevant linguistic patterns in the text are described in explicit terms, thus making it possible for the reader or the critic to objectify his subjective responses or intuitions. It is for this reason that the method of literary stylistics is particularly suitable for the type of study of The Interpreters which I have undertaken in this thesis: it helps me to systematise my responses to the text, which is undoubtedly very complex indeed.

The story told in The Interpreters is simple enough: five friends who have recently returned to Nigeria after completing their studies

in Europe and the United States of America are finding it difficult to settle down in their society as a result of the general atmosphere of disorientation which pervades that society. All five are in some way at odds with the ethos of that society and at the same time each is struggling to "interpret" that society and to discover his own proper role and moral stance in it. Of markedly different temperaments, backgrounds and occupations, they are nevertheless a close-knit group united by a) long-standing and loyal friendship, b) a mocking contempt for the vulgar venality of the community in which they live and c) the search for a viable personal code of beliefs and behaviour. The unexpected and violent death of one of the group has a sudden sobering effect on the remaining four, who shortly afterwards feel themselves attracted to a strange new religious cult. Their association with its leader and one of his disciples combines with the results of one man's disastrous love-affair to plunge the four men and their women-friends into a painful crisis in which tensions already latent among them begin to turn into open estrangements that foreshadow the end of their youthful fellowship.

But the way in which this story has been told is far from straightforward: the entire novel is characterised by a massive disruption of normal time sequence, with the result that the reader is constantly having to connect incidents and episodes which at first sight appear not to have anything to do with each other, but which are linked by certain themes or theme-constellations.

In view of the foregoing, this study of The Interpreters focusses on two basic considerations: a) what is the significance, if any, of the dislocation of normal time sequence in the text; and b) does the novel hang together, in spite of the fragmentary nature of its narrative

sequence? And if so, how does it do so? This means that I shall be discussing the thematic function of the time-shuttling device employed in the text and relating these to the thematic functions of other significant stylistic devices in the text, notably lexical, metaphoric and symbolic motifs. This involves, as the last sentence indicates, discussion of Soyinka's use of language, which undoubtedly draws attention to itself throughout the novel. My concern will be with those deviant uses of language which become prominent through frequent (if sometimes widely-spaced) recurrence, and which are therefore of potential thematic importance, rather than with the many instances of non-recurrent figurative use of language which seem to have been introduced in order to achieve purely local textual effect.

Linguistic analysis in this thesis therefore takes two main forms: a) the study of the cohesive relations that obtain in certain passages (see Chapters 3 and ⁶ below), together with analysis of certain uses of parallelism in syntactic structure; and b) examination of those recurrent metaphors which seem to have thematic significance in relation to the novel as a whole.

The grammatical model used in the linguistic analyses referred to in the last paragraph is that developed within the framework of Systemic Linguistics. The following is a brief account of that model.

Systemic Grammar is essentially a descriptive grammar, that is, it is a tool that can be used to describe actual instances of language in use (Mitchell, Mimeo, 1978:1). It can thus be used to describe "particular varieties, particular idiolects, particular texts..." (Berry, 1977, 1:25). From this point of view, Systemic Grammar is "a framework of concepts" that can be applied to the study of actual patternings in texts (Mitchell, *ibid*). This characteristic of Systemic

Grammar helps to make it an asset for literary stylistics.

The fundamental concept in Systemic Grammar is that of the "system". "A system is a set of options with an entry condition: that is to say, a set of things of which one must be chosen, together with a statement of the conditions under which the choice is available" (Kress, 1976:3). This set of options is the range of formal meaning relations that obtain in the language, that is, English. Furthermore, these formal meaning relations are categorised in terms of a very large network of systems, which is "an arrangement of options in simultaneous and hierarchical relationship", (Kress, 1976:3). The notion of choice in Systemic Grammar has important implications for creative writing in general and for literary stylistics in particular, as we shall see in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

In addition to the concept of System, Systemic Grammar also describes the patterns of English in terms of three other basic concepts: Unit, Structure and Class.

Units are stretches of language which exhibit "certain regularities ...over certain stretches of language activity" (Kress, 1976:56). The units which Systemic Grammar uses to describe the patterns of English are five in number:

Sentence
Clause
Group
Word
Morpheme

These units are related to each other hierarchically: they are arranged on a scale in order of their rank or size, from the biggest unit at the top (Sentence) to the smallest (Morpheme) at the bottom of the scale. This scale is called the rank-scale. Thus a sentence consists

of one or more clauses, a clause comprises one or more groups, a group one or more words and a word is made up of one or more morphemes. But the morpheme has no structure because it is not made up of any other unit, since it is itself the smallest unit on the rank scale.

Since the stretches of language analysed in this thesis are mainly sentences and clauses, I shall restrict myself here only to the description of, a) sentence structure and b) clause structure.

As indicated above, sentences are definable in terms of clauses since they are made up of clauses. A sentence, then, consists of one or more clauses. A clause can be Free or Bound, Linked or Unlinked. Thus, at the primary degree of delicacy, every clause belongs to one of the following types: a) Free and Unlinked; b) Free and Linked; c) Bound and Unlinked; and d) Bound and Linked. Although a Free Unlinked clause can stand on its own and constitute a simple sentence, a Bound clause has to be attached to the clause on which it is dependent (Mitchell, 1978:10) in order to make sense.

One implication of the foregoing is that a Free clause can also be either Major or Minor. A Minor clause is a clause which does not contain a Predicator; such a clause is called a Moodless clause, because it does not show Mood. In addition a Minor clause may also not contain a subject. A Major clause, on the other hand, does show Mood because it contains a Predicator.

With regard to clause structure, the important issue is the classes of group that typically make up the clause. These are: a) the nominal group, which typically occurs at Subject, Complement and Adjunct positions in the clause; b) the verbal group, which occurs at Predicator position in the clause; and c) the adverbial, prepositional

and conjunctional groups, all of which typically occur at Adjunct position in the clause.

The terms "Subject", "Predicator", "Complement" and "Adjunct" refer to the Elements of Clause Structure, or the functions which a group can perform in a clause (Mitchell, 1978:6). Complements can further be divided into Extensive and Intensive Complements. There is, then, a correspondence between Classes of Group and Elements of Clause Structure: the nominal group functions not only at Subject, Complement and Adjunct positions in the clause but as Extensive Complement (C^e) and Intensive Complement (C^i) - adjectival groups also function as Intensive Complement in the clause. We have already seen the nature of the correspondence that exists between the other Classes of Group and Elements of Clause Structure (the verbal group - Predicator; the adverbial, prepositional and conjunctional groups - Adjunct).

In addition, the range of possible structures of the nominal group can be stated in a single formula: $(M)H(Q)$ (Kress, 1976:61). The brackets indicate that M, which stands for "modifier", and Q, which stands for "qualifier" may or may not be present: they are optional elements in the structure. H, that is "head" (of the group), is the obligatory element in the formula: it must always be present.

One issue arising from the hierarchical ordering of the units on the rank-scale is that a unit may shift its rank and operate at a lower rank: this is the notion of Rankshift. Thus, a clause may function as an element of structure within a larger clause: it may function as Subject (S) or as Complement (C). When the clause functions in either of these ways, it is functioning as a group, in which case, it has shifted one place down the rank-scale. But the clause may also shift two places down the rank scale, to function as

an element ("qualifier") in the structure of the (nominal) group.

Each of the elements of clause and group structure referred to above is represented by a symbol in the linguistic system. Some of these symbols have been used above, but they are stated below again together with their interpretations as well as certain other symbols used by systemic grammarians. I have done this in order to make explicit the sense in which I have used these symbols in the body of this thesis.

SYMBOLS

α = Free Clause

β = Bound clause dependent on α

γ = Bound clause dependent on β

} Elements of
Sentence Structure

S = Subject

P = Predicator

C = Complement

C^e = Extensive Complement

C^i = Intensive Complement

A = Adjunct

} Elements of
Clause Structure

M = Modifier

H = Head

Q = Qualifier

} Elements of Nominal
Group Structure

||| = Sentence boundary

|| = Clause boundary

| = Group boundary

[] = Rankshifted Clause functioning at Qualifier

[] = Rankshifted Group functioning at Qualifier.

The thesis falls into three main parts: (a) Part I is made up of Chapter 1; b) Part II consists of Chapters 2-6; and c) Part III comprises the section of the thesis which contains my concluding remarks on the thesis as a whole. In Chapter 1 I discuss the major issues in

literary-stylistic theory and relate them to my study of The Interpreters.

In Chapters 2-6, I make explicit the ways in which I have arrived at the conclusions and hypotheses which I have reached as a result of my reading and interpretation of the text. Furthermore, Part II, which is the longest section of the thesis, sub-divides into three sections made up of [i] Chapter 2; [ii] Chapters 3-5, and [iii] Chapter 6.

Chapter 2 contains a discussion of the nature and thematic function of the disruption of normal time sequence in the text. In Chapter 3, I examine the stylistic devices through which the futility of the fictional world depicted in the text has been realised. This is followed up, in Chapters 4 and 5, by a discussion of those characters who embody this futility of that fictional world. I then demonstrate, in Chapter 6, the way in which the interpreters try to make sense of their lives, since they cannot find a sense of direction in their society.

The major issues in Chapters 1-6 are then highlighted again in the section entitled "Concluding Remarks". The wording of this title is meant to distinguish the section in question from the short conclusions with which each of Chapters 1-6 has been brought to an end. These conclusions highlight the main issues discussed in each chapter and relate it to the discussion in the Chapter following it.

It is hoped that this lay-out will help to facilitate the reading and the digestion of the ideas discussed in this thesis.

CHAPTER 1

"LANGUAGE USE AND LITERARY MEANING": THE CENTRAL ISSUES IN LITERARY STYLISTICS

1.1 PREAMBLE

The first half of the title of this thesis, "Language Use and Literary Meaning" reflects the central issues in literary stylistics. Before I elaborate this point, however, it is necessary for me to put my use of the term "literary stylistics" in proper perspective so as to make clear the sense in which I am using it, since certain other terms are also used to characterise the field of study in question. These terms are: "stylistics" (Hasan, 1971; Kachru and Stahlke, 1972; and Widdowson, 1975), "linguistic stylistics" (Halliday, 1964; and Freeman, 1970), "modern stylistics" (Freeman, 1981), "the new stylistics" (Fowler, 1975) and "linguistic criticism" (Bronzwaer, 1970 and Fowler, 1981).

I have adopted the term "literary stylistics" from Anne Cluysenaar (1976) on the one hand, and from G.N. Leech and M.H. Short (1981) on the other because it seems to me to be the least ambiguous of all the terms used to describe the subject in hand. For instance, the term "stylistics" by itself is too general in scope, and, therefore, too vague to be useful in relation to the following discussion. This vagueness arises from the fact that there is a linguistic as well as a literary notion of stylistics, as the next section of this Chapter shows. "Literary stylistics", on the other hand, makes it clear that it is the study of literature that I am primarily interested in.

Literary stylistics, then, has as its main aim the "study of language as used in literary texts, with the aim of relating it to

its artistic functions" (Leech and Short, 1981:15). This interest is based on the understanding that there are two main aspects to the study of literature: a) that of linguistic description; and b) that of critical (literary) interpretation; and that although the two activities involve basically different operations, they are inseparably bound together (Leech, 1970:120).

In view of the foregoing, the following discussion seeks to demonstrate the close link that exists between language use in general and literary language while at the same time showing the ways in which the latter deviates from the former. The discussion is thus divided into two broad sections: a) literature as an instance of language in use; and b) the implications of this factor for literary criticism.

1.2 LITERATURE AS AN INSTANCE OF LANGUAGE USE

Literature is an instance of language in use. The implications of this observation are far-reaching: they are significant not only for literary criticism but also for linguistics as well as literature itself. For instance, since literature is language in use, it means that the starting-point for our discussion of literary language will have to be a consideration of intra-language variation - that is, of language varieties.

Already, the term "language use" indicates that language is used to effect communicative value. In other words, language is used to mean (Halliday, 1975:8). Or to put it in another form, it is used primarily "to achieve some kind of communicative purpose" (Widdowson, 1978:3). Since to use language is to mean something, therefore, and since literature constitutes an instance of language use, we have to study literary communication against the background of the way language

is used outside literature in order to have a balanced view of the subject: i.e. we must study literary uses of language from a linguistic point of view.

Use, however, necessarily implies style. From the linguistic point of view, style has to do with the cultivation on the part of the language user, of "appropriate linguistic 'manners' for the different types of situation in which language is used" (Crystal and Davy, 1969:5). In other words, the notion of style in the way it is being used here is essentially concerned with the way in which language is used to mean: it only becomes meaningful when used in situation. This means that fluency in a language does not simply involve the user's cognitive knowledge of the various formal meaning relations that obtain in that language - which is a question of recognising the way in which language is internally organised and patterned. Rather, it depends more on the user's ability to match those formal patterns with extra-linguistic contexts or situations - his ability to select the appropriate linguistic patterns to use in particular situations. Thus, a language user has to know how to construct grammatically correct sentences in the relevant language. At the same time, however, he must be able to use these sentences appropriately in situation to "achieve a communicative purpose" (Widdowson, 1978:2).¹ In other words, while he has to be able to produce correct sentences in the relevant language, a language user should also be aware of the constraints imposed on his use of those sentences by the principle of appropriacy if he wants to be intelligible.

¹He uses the term "usage" to refer to the construction of correct sentences in a language - for example, English; and "use" to describe the way in which those sentences are used to achieve a communicative purpose (pp2 ff.). His point - which is a valid one - is that both usage and use are significant for the achieving of a communicative purpose, and that they therefore should not (indeed cannot) be separated in language teaching.

These constraints are imposed by certain situational variables which, broadly speaking, are three in number: a) field of discourse - that is, what the discourse is about, its subject-matter; b) mode of discourse or medium - that is, the physical form in which a stretch of discourse is coded, whether it is spoken or written; and c) tenor of discourse - which is concerned with the interpersonal aspects of the discourse situation (Enkvist et al, 1964:84)² Briefly, this means that the linguistic choices which one makes in one's use of language in situation are conditioned by what it is that one is talking about, by whether one is speaking or writing and by one's relationship to the other participant or participants in the discourse situation. For instance, if one is talking about politics, one would make use of certain grammatical and lexical items which one knows, as a result of one's experience of the range of the potential of use, tend to occur in texts dealing with the same subject³. Furthermore, phonological patterns which are commonly found in spoken language take on new forms in the written medium.⁴

² See especially note 1 on pp. 86-87 for a useful comment on the various definitions of the concepts expressed by field of discourse, mode of discourse, (or medium) and tenor of discourse.

³ It is to be noted that politics itself is a large topic which subsumes other smaller topics. For instance, if one is describing a debate in parliament, one's choice of linguistic patterns will vary slightly from that made in a description of a debate at the local government level, and so on. This observation applies to other topics as well.

⁴ The ways in which some of these patterns do so are discussed in Leech and Short (1981:210 ff).

And finally in this respect, the addresser's relationship with the addressee or addressees will determine the linguistic choices which he makes from the range of potential meanings available to him, in the discourse situation. This last factor is basically responsible for the semantic shifts or "shifts of meaning" (McIntosh, Mimeo, 1961:3 (footnote)) which occur in different situations. For example, certain lexical collocations mean different things to young people and to older people; or are interpreted differently in various situations as a result of this interpersonal factor.

The range of potential meanings available to a language user, which was mentioned in the last paragraph, constitutes the totality of his experience of a particular language. This range is to be distinguished from the range of potential meanings or of the potential of use which is available in the language in general, (Halliday, 1975: 8; and Ellis, 1966). Since the language user can only make linguistic choices from the range of the potential of use available to him, therefore, his ability to use language appropriately in situation depends largely on the extent to which he has been exposed to several texts and, therefore, to different varieties of language in a large number of discourse situations. It is the study of these language varieties that constitutes the major concern of stylistics from the linguistic point of view. It is thus the "linguistic study of systematic, situationally-distinctive, intra-language variation." (Crystal, 1972: 103) Thus, in order for one to produce meaningful utterances as well as respond appropriately to texts in discourse situations, one must have a sense of style. Style and meaning are therefore correlated.

This linguistic notion of style is, however, inadequate for

describing the nature of literary communication, for one main reason, namely, that literature is unique as a variety of language. For instance, it does not satisfy the "usual criteria for the assignment of a text to any register" (Hasan, 1971: 307). In the first place, literary texts are not restricted in terms of field, tenor and mode of discourse. Secondly, a literary text cannot be distinguished from other language varieties simply on the basis of certain "consistent and unique property of linguistic pattern selection." (Ibid) which is the basis on which non-literary varieties of language are generally recognised to be different from one another. The reason for this is that literary discourse exploits at any one time the entire repertoire of the linguistic choices available in the range of the potential of use which comes within the experience of each individual writer. One effect of this factor is that a literary text is itself a compound of different varieties of language. Thus, the only constraints on the linguistic choices made by the writer are imposed by the demands of his own communicative intention in a literary text, and not by virtue of literary discourse being a variety of language as such. In other words, linguistic patterns acquire significance in a literary text not as a result of their having obeyed certain rules of grammar, but rather by virtue of the part they play in clarifying the communicative purpose of the relevant writer.

In view of the foregoing, it is possible to describe extensively those linguistic patterns which typically characterise individual non-literary varieties of language.⁵

⁵For instance, Crystal and Davy (op.cit) have studied the language of conversation, the language of unscripted commentary, the language of religion, the language of newspaper reporting and the language of legal documents. And G.N. Leech has done an extensive study of linguistic patterns typically found in advertisements. (Leech 1966)

But it is not possible to do the same for literary language, because of the diversity of its patterns.

In addition, we do not study literary language for its own sake. Rather, we study it for the purpose of discovering how certain artistic effects have been achieved in a literary text through the way language has been used in it. In view of this factor, literature is both a verbal structure as well as an art form. In other words, there are two aspects to a literary text: the verbal and the artistic (Hasan, 1971 : 300).

The implication of this observation for the study of style is that we will have to account for it not just on one level but on various levels if we are to adequately describe what happens in a literary text. Our definition of style should therefore have a broad base to accommodate the various ways in which that term has been defined. In this respect, monism, dualism and pluralism have something useful to contribute to the study of style and, therefore, to literary interpretation. Monism is that approach to style which makes no distinction between what is said (content) and the way it is said (style) (see, for example, Schorer, 1948, and Lodge, 1966). Dualism on the other hand, distinguishes between "what a linguistic form means" (sense) "and what it refers to" (reference) (Leech and Short, page 36). This view has the advantage of showing that there can be more than one way of saying the same thing, more than one way of conceptualising the same event (Ibid). Finally, there is pluralism, which derives from the functional approach to language study - according to which any one linguistic choice made by a speaker or writer can be accounted for from different points simultaneously.

According to this view, language is internally organised and patterned on the basis of multiplicity of function, as a result of the fact that it is used to serve a variety of needs (Halliday, 1973: 105). Hence, there are in language various sets of structural "roles" which are

mapped onto one another, so that the actual structure-forming element in language is a complex of roles, like a chord in a fugue: for example Sir Christopher Wren, in the clause Sir Christopher Wren built this gazebo, is at once actor and subject and theme.... Each of these three represents a value in some configuration - some melodic line, so to speak - such as 'process plus actor plus goal'. And all such configurations are meaningful, since ... the basic functions of language, looked at from another point of view, are simply different kinds of meaning.

(Halliday, 1970:144)⁶

Both dualism and pluralism are of great significance for the study of literature - especially prose fiction - in the sense that the same events are often represented in different ways. For this reason, it is necessary to separate content from the way it is put across for the purpose of demonstrating the way in which the same artistic effect is achieved through the clever manipulation of linguistic variants (cf. Leech and Short, 1981:26 ff.).

What has been established so far is that since literature is an instance of language in use, it has a linguistic basis although it at

⁶ He identifies three main functions of language: a) the ideational function, which subdivides into the experiential and the logical functions; b) the interpersonal function and ; c) the textual function. For descriptions of these functions, see Halliday (1970&73).

the same time differs from non-literary varieties of language in certain respects. We need now to describe, in broad terms, the major characteristics of literary language itself so as to make explicit how it relates to, as well as how it differs from, non-literary language. Since it is a novel that is examined in the present study, the following discussion concentrates on the language of prose fiction.

1.3 BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF LITERARY COMMUNICATION

1.3.1 The Notion of Text as Applied to Literature

Earlier on in this discussion it was stated that since language is used to achieve communicative effect, it is used in discourse situations. Thus, in a discourse situation, the addresser creates a text to which the addressee responds. A text is therefore the physical form - spoken or written - in which the addresser's intended meaning is encoded (see Leech and Short, pages 209-10. Cf. Widdowson, 1975:7 ff., and Fowler, 1977: 56 ff.). Hence a piece of creative writing comes to the reader as a text, and he tries to establish its meaning by working out the way in which the parts fit together. He is aided in this task by his realisation that certain normative rules - for example, those of sequencing, juxtaposition and so on - are typically manifested in texts; and that the manifestation of these rules provides guidance as to the way in which he retrieves the "message" from the relevant text.

It is these factors of sequencing, juxtaposition and so on that give rise to the linear characteristic of texts, and linearity has important implications not only for language in general but also for literature in particular. Thus, linearity is the "overriding property of texts": "speech occurs linearly in time, and writing, imitating

speech occurs linearly in space" (Leech and Short, 1981:211). One result of this linear characteristic of text, then, is that the reader can only experience the literary text in bits at any one time. In fact, second and later readings of texts (especially of prose fiction) may involve much non-linear "shuttling" back and forth across the whole text in order to achieve a sense of aesthetic and communicative cohesion, or coherence.⁷ In responding to the text, therefore, the reader is basically, responding to the linear pattern in it: he anticipates and looks back, thus getting actively involved with the text.

There are five main factors involved in textual organisation: segmentation, sequence, salience, iconicity and cohesion (Leech and Short, 1981: 209 ff.) The first three of these factors - segmentation, sequence and salience - "are also basic to the form of written texts" (Ibid, page 212). In decoding spoken utterances it is necessary for the listener to segment it into units or chunks of information so as to make sense of it. Linearity thus entails segmentation. In speech, it is the tone unit that constitutes a "chunk" of information; but since tone units are subdivided into smaller units, such as syllables and phonemes, and since they also form part of larger units, segmentation in turn involves a hierarchy of units. "Hierarchization

⁷ We need to distinguish here between "experience reading" and critical study of the text, as the former does not involve analysis. From this point of view, Stanley Fish's observation that in reading, the reader's responses develop "in relation to the words in the text as they succeed one another in reading time" (Fish, 1970 : 126-127) is weakened by our realisation that he is talking about "experience reading". This limitation has to be seen within the larger framework of his attempt to substitute a new form of stylistics for literary stylistics (Fish, 1973), which fails largely because he takes too many linguistic and literary issues for granted. See Culler (1981:119-131) and Kintgen (1977) for an assessment of Fish's method. See also footnote 21 in this Chapter.

in turn means that certain parts of the text are perceived as more salient, or highlighted, than others." (Ibid.)

The factor of sequencing is based on the linguistic distinction between theme and rheme and, in speech, there is a tendency for given information to precede new information.

This is "the principle of end-focus" (Leech and Short, 1981: 212-214). But this principle is manifested in writing in a form different from the way in which it is manifested in speech: the nuclear stress which marks the new information ^{be} can be replaced in writing by italics (in typescript) or underlining (in manuscript) or by capitalisation (in both). The principle of end-focus is thus not as significant for written texts as it is for speech. It is not therefore significant for literature, which mostly takes the written form. Segmentation and sequence are, however, particularly important for literature when seen from the point of view of "iconicity" in literature, which in turn is best discussed in the context of iconicity in language in general:

A code is iconic to the extent that it imitates, in its signals or textual forms, the meanings that they represent. The code of traffic signs is largely iconic: a crossroads is signalled by a cross, a narrowing road by converging lines, etc. The maritime flag code, on the other hand, is non-iconic: there is no connection between the colour and design of a flag and the meaning (such as 'I am altering course to port') which it is used to signify.

(Leech and Short, 1981:233-234)

It is at the syntactic level that language is best seen to be iconic; for it is the syntactic relations that obtain between words which

imitate"relations between the objects and events which those words signify"(Ibid.,page 234).

Two crucial examples of this type of iconicity are, a) chronological sequencing and b) juxtaposition. In chronological sequencing, textual time imitates real time - that is, the way in which textual patterns succeed one another reflects the way in which events in real life precede and follow one another. The latter thus imitates the way in which cause precedes effect in real life. This factor has as its syntactic equivalent the way in which certain elements of clause structure, particularly the Subject (S) and the Predicator (P) are sequenced in English declarative clauses. It is also usual for the Subject to precede the Complement (C) or Object (O). Thus, the following is a typical structure of a transitive declarative clause in English:

S + P + C + A

I / bought / a pen / yesterday.

This iconic element in language is, like other linguistic elements, fully exploited in creative (literary) compositions by authors in their presentation of events in narratives. They may either keep to it or disrupt it to create varying degrees of confusion in the literary text.

Closely linked to chronological sequencing is juxtaposition, which assumes iconic significance from the point of view that "words which are close in the text may evoke an impression of closeness or connectedness in the fiction - not only closeness of time, but psychological or locative relatedness" (ibid.,239). For instance, the items in a long Subject in a clause are kept together at Subject position by means of rankshift, thus obeying the principle of juxtaposition.

The following pair of clauses illustrate the point.

- | | | | | | |
|---|-------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|------------|
| | S | | P | C | A |
| 1 | A man | <u>[[accused of burglary]]</u> | committed | suicide | last week. |
-
- | | | | | | |
|---|-------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| | S | P | C | A | S(?) |
| 2 | A man | committed | suicide | last week | <u>[[accused of burglary.]]</u> |

Clearly (2) is not acceptable the way it stands, the reason being that accused of burglary has been unnecessarily separated from the other elements which occur at Subject position, where it properly belongs. Conversely, (1) is meaningful mainly because the elements which make up the Subject have been put together by means of rankshift: a man accused of burglary is a nominal group with the following structure!

m	h	q
a	man	[[accused of burglary]]

in which m stands for "modifier", h for "head" and q for "qualifier".

Since accused of burglary is qualifying man, therefore, it has to stay close to it to make the statement in which the nominal group occurs meaningful.

This principle of juxtaposition is, however, constantly broken in literature for various reasons. But it is also kept to to a certain extent. In the latter case, the important thing to notice is that literature is iconic in the sense that it adapts linguistic expression to literary function.

The notion of cohesion is a relational concept, in the sense that it "refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text, and that define it as a text" (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 4, Cf. Halliday and Hasan (forthcoming)). The concept of cohesion is thus based on the notion of a tie: the interpretation of one item (the presupposing

item) depends on that of another (the presupposed). The two items in a tie - which could be either grammatical or lexical - are therefore cohesively related (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 3-4). But although cohesion is expressed both through the grammar and the vocabulary, it is not a structural concept in the sense that a text does not have grammatical structure - that is, unit-structure, rank and so on. In other words, the text hangs together in a way different from words, groups, clauses and sentences. For instance, we can analyse a word, a group, a clause or a sentence in terms of its structural units; but in cohesion, we are concerned with formal relations between parts of sentences but not between sentences as a whole.⁸

The different kinds of cohesive tie are: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion; and it is the actualisation of their potential that gives rise to the creation of the texture of the text. And it is the texture so created that enables the text to function as "a single meaningful unit" (*ibid.*, page 30) in the context in which it is manifested.

In relation to literary interpretation, however, cohesion is not of direct significance. For one thing, it manifests, mainly, the various formal meaning relations built into the language system. For another, one cannot indicate communicative links between the several texts (or sub-texts) that make up a literary text by simply invoking certain cohesive relations as the authority for one's connections. One needs a more forceful and convincing basis on which to base one's hypotheses-forming procedures in the text.

⁸

This does not, however, mean that there is no cohesion within sentences; for instance, the grammatical structure of the sentence performs a cohesive function, thus helping it to hang together. (*ibid.*, p. 8)

This basis is supplied by the factor of coherence. It is this factor that enables us to make thematic links in the literary text.

The importance of coherence over cohesion for literary interpretation is further exemplified by the fact that certain texts can be coherent without being cohesive: that is to say, there are texts which are meaningful in spite of the fact that they do not exhibit overt cohesive signals which typically manifest the various cohesive relations. Conversely, the fact that cohesive relations are explicitly manifested in a text is not a guarantee that that text is coherent - that is, that it "makes sense". Thus the fact that a text is cohesive does not always mean that it is also coherent (Widdowson, 1978: 22 ff.)⁹. Texts produced by a language user exhibit cohesive relations as a matter of course (as these relations have been built into the language system). In other words, the way in which language is internally patterned and organised is reflected in every instance of language use in discourse situations.

A good example of this phenomenon is provided by the cohesive relation of lexical reiteration. Lexical reiteration in English takes four basic forms:

- 1 repetition of same word, whether the presupposed item - that is, the second item in the tie - has the same grammatical form as the presupposing item - that is, the first item in the tie - or not;
- 2 substitution of a synonym, or near-synonym, of the presupposing item;
- 3 the use of a superordinate item;

- 4 the use of a general word - typically a noun (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 279)

⁹ He distinguishes between cohesion and coherence.

If the presupposing and the presupposed items have the same referent, they are cohesively related through the formal meaning relation of co-reference: they therefore belong together in an "identity chain". But even if they have unrelated referents, they are still cohesively related and, therefore, meaningful - for the mere fact that the one is a repetition of the other. They now belong together in a "similarity chain".¹⁰ Such pairs of words are, however, not likely to be meaningful from the point of view of coherence.

So, cohesion belongs, strictly speaking, to the domain of language usage and coherence to that of "language use" (Widdowson, 1978). All this does not, however, mean that the notion of cohesion has no place in studies of literary communication. What it does mean is that the concept has to be subordinated to that of coherence in discourse (non-literary as well as literary) situations. An awareness of the cohesive relations that obtain in language helps us to make our descriptions of textual patterns explicit (Cf. Leech, 1970:121). For factors of cohesion are bound to manifest themselves in the various sub-texts that make up the literary text; and in discovering the way in which these sub-texts are thematically linked to one another, we are also trying to

¹⁰ Both the identity chain (IC) and the similarity chain (SC) are integrative devices which are used to enhance the texture of the text. ICs are made up, typically, of grammatical items such as pronouns and deictics; and also of lexical items that are connected, in a specific text, through the cohesive relation of reference or co-reference. Repeated proper names in a text also enter into ICs.

Similarly chains, on the other hand, have as their members only lexical items: the "semantic relations between the members of an SC may be more generally described as that of co-extension (coE) and co-classification (coC)". (Hasan, 1978:4). The relation of co-extension is established only through lexical cohesion while that of co-classification can also be realised "by the cohesive devices of ellipsis and substitution" (*ibid*), which manifest grammatical cohesion.

see how each sub-text constitutes a meaningful unit. This is the point in our description at which cohesion is seen to complement coherence most effectively. This factor also has important pedagogical implications.

In addition to the foregoing, the concept of cohesion is also useful for literary interpretation in another way: since the language used in literary texts has to be studied against the background of language use in non-literary discourse situations, it follows that the way in which communicative cohesion or coherence is achieved in literary texts also has to be studied against the background of the formal meaning relations that obtain in language if our linguistic description and, consequently, literary interpretation are to be as explicit as they should be. From this point of view, the linguistic study of cohesion in literary texts has a lot to offer the reader and the critic (see Gutwinski, 1976).

It can thus be seen that the linguistic notion of text is in many ways significant for literary communication. In establishing this factor, the last section has further demonstrated that literature has its basis firmly in language use, and that it is therefore normal to give a linguistic base to its study. However, literature cannot be studied merely by seeing literary compositions as text; for, as we have seen, the way in which the various parts of the text relate to one another is a thematic consideration - a factor of coherence. And coherence is in turn a factor of discourse. And with the consideration of literature as discourse, we come also to the examination of literature as an art form.

1.3.2 The Notion of Discourse as Applied to Literature

1.3.2.1 Fictionality

Literature is chiefly distinguished from other forms of discourse by the elaborate manner in which it exploits the fact of its fictionality. Thus, it is not the fact that a literary text is an imaginative composition¹¹ (which it is) that is unique in itself. Rather, it is the extent to which it exploits this fact that is crucial. For literature comes in that category of texts which are created in the process of "hypothesis -building" (Hasan, 1971:310) for the purpose of putting forward a point of view. In this connection, it shares the basic characteristics of certain other types of "fictive speech acts" such as assumptions made "for the sake of the discussion", the verbal expression of day-dreams, imaginings, plannings...wishings and fantasizings.... " (Pratt, 1977:91)¹² in that they all force us to suspend for a while our view of reality as we know it and put something in its place. These fictive speech acts also include certain types of jokes and, indeed, the telling of lies for that matter. In addition, there is a linguistic factor which unites literature and some of these other forms of hypothesis-building: their hypothetical worlds are created through past tense forms even though the "events" which they describe or refer to are not deemed to have happened in the past.

¹¹ See, for example, Fowler (1973:105) for a definition of literature.

¹² Her entire argument is based on the thesis that literary language is only distinct from the point of view that it exploits the norms of ordinary everyday language. It is therefore not distinct in an absolute sense. The development of a theory of literary discourse should thus proceed along these lines. This essentially is the view taken in this study.

In fact, the past tense is a type of fiction-marker.¹³

In view of the foregoing, then, literature should be studied in the context of the ways in which we use language to "conceive and manipulate hypothetical worlds or states of affairs" (Pratt, 1977:92).

Furthermore, as well as its being used to create fictional narratives and fictional worlds, language is also used for purposes of rendering non-fictional narratives - that is, narratives describing events which happen in real life. These are "natural narratives" (as opposed to fictional narratives), (Ibid., pages 38 ff.) or "narratives of personal experience" (Labov, 1972:354; Pratt, 1977: :40 ff.).

In spite of certain structural differences which exist between narratives of personal experience and narratives in novels, the two types of narrative are basically related: several aspects of natural narratives are manifested in fictional narratives, although not in the same order and not in exactly the same forms.¹⁴

The point being made here is that the fictionality of literature - that is, the way in which fictional worlds are created in literary texts - has its basis in the way language is generally used for hypothesis-building in non-literary situations; and that fictional narrative shares certain principles of composition with non-fictional narratives. The effect of this observation for the subject in hand is to locate even more firmly the basis of literary language in language use in non-literary situations.

1.3.2.2 Author-Reader Relationship

The central issue here is that the author of a literary

¹³On this point see Leech (1971:106:122) and Bronzwaer (1970:45):
 "The function of the preterite (past tense) in any novel is not to assign the events narrated to any time-sphere at all, but to 'fictionalize' them...."

¹⁴See Pratt, (1977) for a detailed discussion of this view.

text creates a fictional world, not as an end in itself, but as a means of putting across a point of view to whoever might read the relevant text. Thus, in the literary discourse situation, the author is not simply trying to inform his readers about a particular fictional world; rather, he is essentially trying to get them to react to the text in a certain way or in certain ways. For there are in a literary text two layers of symbolisation:

the categories of the code of the language are used to symbolize a set of situations, events, processes, entities, etc. (as they are in the use of language in general); these situations, events, entities, etc., in their turn are used to symbolize a theme or a theme-constellation.

(Hasan, 1971:309)

It is in this second layer of symbolisation that the "message" of the text is located; and the success of a reading effort will depend largely on how appropriately the reader has been able to respond to the text at this level. He is, of course, aided in his efforts in this direction by his knowledge of the "code of the language" in which the text has been produced (the first layer of symbolisation). At the same time, however, he has also to be aware, as much as possible, of the range of the conventions of literature which embody certain normative rules concerning the production and reception of literary texts - for example, the dropping by the author of linguistic and other cues in the text which serve as guidelines for the reader.

From this point of view, the "decoding" of literary texts is, basically, not different from the way in which messages are decoded in non-literary discourse situations. In both cases, the addresser

and the addressee are aware of the existence of certain linguistic as well as non-linguistic conventions which demand that they respectively produce and respond to the text in question in certain ways. Thus, the difference between the literary and the non-literary discourse situations is a matter of degree; there is nothing absolute about it. So, rather than talk about the two discourse situations as being mutually exclusive of each other, we should compare the discourse situation of spoken texts and that of written texts; and treat literature as written text.¹⁵ The point about literature in this respect, then, is that it belongs to that group of written texts which are manifested in discourse situations where there is only one addresser but large numbers of addressees,

the vast majority of whom the writer has never met.

Literature is thus a kind of discourse where the writer can assume relatively little about the receiver of his message or the context in which it will be received.

(Leech and Short, 1981:258)

It is worthwhile to point out, in connection with the foregoing, that a very large number of non-literary texts such as textbooks, academic journals, university handbooks and so on,¹⁶ have a clearly specifiable readership which is predictable in terms of the participant roles, subject-matter, and so on, handled by register studies. The reader of fiction, however, is in no predictable social role, as is evident

¹⁵Most literature, especially Western literature, is written. But the oral tradition is still very strong in Africa and Asia, for example. However, it is with written literature that I am concerned in this study.

¹⁶Fowler (1981:24 ff. especially 37-45) gives some samples of this category of written texts.

from the following statement by Widdowson (1975:51):

... a piece of literary discourse is in suspense from the usual process of social interaction whereby senders address messages directly to receivers. The literary message does not arise in the normal course of social activity as do other messages, it arises from no previous situation and requires no response, it does not serve as a link between people or as a means of furthering the business of ordinary social life.

As a result of this factor, Widdowson distinguishes between "Sender" and "Receiver" (of a message) on the one hand, and "Addresser" and "Addressee" on the other. This distinction is crucial for literary stylistics, for two reasons: a) it renders in linguistic terms the distinction between the real author and the "implied author" which Wayne C. Booth makes. The term "implied author" refers to the version of the "real human author"¹⁷ which he creates in each of his texts. And as each text by the same "real" author differs from the other in orientation and perspective, it is versions of the author-as- person that emerge and not just one version.¹⁸ b) Widdowson's distinction is also crucial in that it effectively makes the point that the addressee and the receiver of literary messages are not necessarily the same person. He thus characterises literary communication in the

17 The term "implied author" was introduced by Booth (1961:71ff).

18 Thus, although the human being called Wole Soyinka is the "real" author of The Interpreters and Season of Anomy (both novels), and of The Lion and the Jewel and Kongi's Harvest (plays), the implied author in each case differs from the next since the four texts imply "different ideal combinations of norms" (Booth, 1961: 71), four different perspectives. The term "second self" is sometimes used to refer to the implied author. (See for instance, Kathleen Tillotson (1959)). Any time the term "author" is used in this work, then, it refers to the implied author unless otherwise specified.

following manner:

	I/II	II/III	
Sender	Addresser	Addressee	Receiver

(Widdowson, 1975: 51)

At one extreme is a sender who transmits a message to a receiver at the other extreme. But sandwiched between these two extremes is an addresser - who is distinct from the sender - coding a message to an addressee - who is a fourth party in the overall discourse situation. What we have in the literary discourse situation, then, is "a communication situation within a communication situation...." (*ibid.*, page 50).

This way of talking about literary discourse is a very useful one indeed. For instance, poets frequently address directly certain personages or inanimate objects, in which case the addressee is different from the receiver of the main message - the reader of the poem. Even when novelists purportedly address their "readers" directly,¹⁹ they are not addressing those people as real flesh-and-bone readers, since they do not know exactly who these readers are in real life. Rather, they are addressing them as "implied readers". In fact, the implied reader is a reality in any literary text, for it is he who confronts the implied author in the text. Thus, although the real author or sender does not, in most literary texts, send his intended message directly to a receiver, the implied author directly sends his message to an implied reader.

¹⁹ The novels of Henry Fielding (especially Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones) and Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy are often used to illustrate this phenomenon. See, for example, Iser (1974) and Fowler (1977).

The term "implied reader" was introduced into literary criticism by Wolfgang Iser (Iser, 1974 & 1978). Cf. 1971) as a substitute for certain earlier terms which he feels are inadequate for describing the activities which the reader engages in during the reading process. The terms replaced are : "ideal reader", "superreader" (Riffaterre, 1959 & 1973), "informed reader" (Fish, 1970) and "intended reader" Wolff, 1971 - see Iser, 1978:27 ff).²⁰

Iser's concept of the implied reader, which he develops within the phenomenological approach to the study of the nature of aesthetic response,²¹ can be described in the following manner. A hypothetical construct, the implied reader

embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect - predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as

²⁰For a useful review of these theories of the reader, see Iser (1978: 27 ff.). He also compares the concept of the implied reader with that of the contemporary reader.

²¹This approach to literary studies is based on the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who is generally regarded as the father of modern Phenomenology. (A philosophical concept, Phenomenology is the study of modes of perception of objects). Husserl's work is based on that of Franz Brentano (1838-1917) and of Meinong (1853-1938), but he went beyond both men by developing a theory of Transcendental or Pure Phenomenology in which he attempts a systematic description of the essential structures (Eidos) of objects as well as a descriptive analysis of the processes involved in the perception (or experiencing) of those objects. (See, for example, Raval (1973:216-226) and White (1957)).

The central factor in the phenomenological approach to the study of aesthetic response is that there is a dynamic relationship between the text and the reader; its main concern is thus to describe the nature of this relationship. Some of the other exponents of the method (apart from Iser) are: Roman Ingarden (1973); Jean-Paul Sartre (1947); Georges Poulet (1969). Cf. Fish (1970) and David Bleich (1978).

The major drawback of this theory from the point of view of literary stylistics is that it does not account for what happens in the reading process in a linguistically disciplined manner. It is therefore "pre-linguistic" (Fowler, 1981:34). For an account of some of the other main limitations of this approach - and, indeed, of reader-response criticism in general - see, for example, Verdaasdonk and Rees (1977:55-76); and Verdaasdonk (1981:91-107). Cf. Culler (1981).

a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader.

(Iser, 1978:34)²¹

From this point of view, the notion of the implied reader is a textual structure. Since literary texts already contain linguistic as well as non-linguistic cues which allow the reader to arrive at their overall meaning, it means that they anticipate the "presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him" (Iser, 1978 :34). Thus, the text offers a particular role to the real reader to play. It is "this role that constitutes the concept of the implied reader" (ibid, pages 34-35). As was stated earlier in this section, the author creates the fictional world as a means of putting across a point of view concerning the real world. The way in which this world is constructed reflects the attitude of the author towards his subject. In order for the reader to recognise the nature of this attitude, the text provides guidelines for the interpretation of the fictional world. When the reader recognises these guidelines and bases his developing interpretation of the text on them, he is performing a structured act, thus functioning as implied reader.

This does not, however, mean that the concept of the implied reader is an abstraction derived from a real reader. Rather, it is a force that conditions the transition from real reader to implied reader. (Iser, 1978:37. Cf. Booth, 1961: 138). This force emanates from the text.

²² Cf. Booth's "mock reader" (Booth, 1961: 138-139).

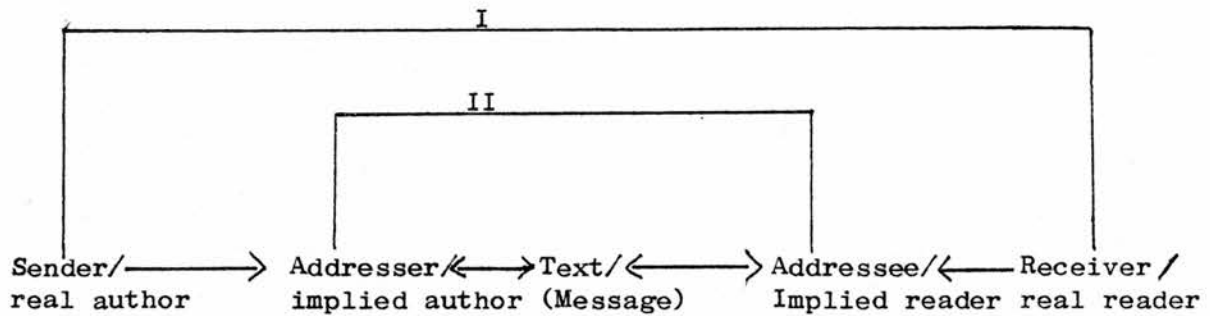
When this transition takes place, there is tension which arises mainly from the fact that the implied reader cannot be completely separated from the real reader, whose beliefs and disposition will never disappear completely anyway. For, in his interaction with the text, the implied reader falls back in the course of his reading on the real reader's knowledge of the real world (which includes knowledge of the language code in which the text has been written) as an aid to his analysis and interpretation. Thus, the real reader constitutes a referential background against which the unfamiliar fictional world can be mentally visualised (see Iser, 1978:36-37 & 38. Cf. Iser, 1974:293, and Poulet, 1969: 56 ff.). The part which this background plays in the reading process will vary from text to text, according to the nature of the structured act which the text demands of the reader.

The notion of the implied reader is central in literary-stylistic theory and practice: the point about every text creating its own reader arises from an issue which I raised earlier in this Chapter, namely, that the real reader, who is the ultimate recipient of the "message" of the literary text, is in no predictable social role in relation to the text as a result of a major difference that exists between literary and non-literary discourse situations.

In addition, the implied author, too, cannot be completely cut off from the real author, who constitutes the referential background for the creative activity of the implied author. The type of implied author which emerges from the text is largely determined by the real author's communicative intention which is not accessible.²³

²³ This fact is brought out by Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954 :11) in their description of the "Intentional Fallacy", which is a "confusion between the poem and its origins, a special case of what is known to philosophers as the Genetic Fallacy." See also pp. 3-18.

So, since it is the implied author that shapes the fictional world, the message of the text can only be recovered from the text and not from the mind of the real author. This factor reinforces the view that the real author does not directly communicate with the real reader. In view of the foregoing, then, we can amend Widdowson's original representation of literary discourse in the following manner:



This simple diagram shows that there is a primary communicative situation - marked I - and a secondary one - II. A real author has an individual view of reality which he wishes to express. But because this new reality is different from the one which he is aware of as a member of a sociological group, he projects a version of himself into the text to create his version of reality. At the other extreme is a real reader who decides for whatever reason to read a literary text. But since the text has not been prepared for him in particular, he has to achieve a rapport with it if he wants to decode its message successfully. He achieves this rapport by responding to the role mapped out for him in the text, which gives him subtle directions as to how to get to recognise the author's attitude to his subject. So, it is the implied author who directly addresses the implied reader in the text, although both the real author and the real reader constitute virtual backgrounds for the production and the reception of the literary message respectively. The

arrow linking Sender or real author and Addresser or implied author on the one hand, and that linking Receiver or real reader and Addressee or implied reader on the other are meant to show that the implied author and the implied reader are projected versions of the real author and the real reader respectively. The two-headed arrow connecting the Addresser or implied author and the Addressee or implied reader to the text is meant to show the close relationship that exists between each of the two concepts and the text, and between the two concepts themselves.

In addition to the foregoing, just as it is not possible to cut the implied author off from the real author and vice versa, and just as it is also not possible to draw an absolute line of distinction between the implied reader and the real reader, so also is it not possible to talk about the real author and the real reader in a vacuum. For just as they serve as referential backgrounds for the activities of the implied author and of the implied reader, so also do they, too, operate against the background of the society in which they live and operate as creators and receivers of literary messages. This is a socio-linguistic factor; and it is this aspect of literary discourse that forms the basis of Roger Fowler's approach to literary stylistics with respect to the study of prose fiction (see Fowler, 1977 & 1981).

The thrust of Fowler's argument is that the method of literary stylistics would lack depth if it ignored the larger framework provided by sociolinguistics (Fowler, 1981:180-200). The key to this framework is the intersubjective nature of literary discourse:

Narrative discourse is created out of the interaction of the culture's conventions, the author's expressive deployment of these conventions as they are coded in

language, and the reader's activity in releasing meaning from the text. The co-operative process is not personal, in that it does not depend on the private feeling of writer or reader, not impersonal, in that human beings are vitally involved, but intersubjective, a communicative act calling upon shared values. We as readers recognise cues in our language as it is deployed by the novelist at the level of implied author, narrator or 'I-figure', or character, and reconstruct voices and personal roles for the participants in the dialogic structure of the novel.

(Fowler, 1977:81)

Thus, as hinted at earlier, the real author bases his individual view of a new reality on the view of reality accepted by his society at large. For example, the fictional world created by a British novelist would be substantially different from that created by a Nigerian novelist and vice versa, simply because they are working within vastly

different cultural backgrounds. And that is also the reason why readers from one culture often find it difficult to read certain texts which have not been produced from within their own cultures. Furthermore, there is also an historical dimension to this issue. Twentieth-century readers, for instance, often find it difficult to fully appreciate certain stylistic features which appear in literary texts produced in earlier centuries in the same geographical environment but from within traditions whose perspectives on life were basically different from theirs - even though they and the relevant writers all belong essentially to the same culture.

In addition, the key stylistic devices which we invoke in our analysis and interpretation of literary texts have been accepted as such by the relevant part of the society - that is, the interpretative

community. So, although each literary text is unique in itself, in that it embodies a different view of reality, its creation and reception are the results of appeals by both the author and the reader to the linguistically-coded cultural norms of that geographical area in which it has its birth. Thus, the personal element in literary discourse is supplanted by the intersubjective element, but without its being obliterated. It is also in view of this factor that Jonathan Culler (1981:127) stresses the interpersonal nature of the reading process:

Obeisance to the 'creativity' of individual readers is an obstacle to achievement because reading is worth analyzing only in so far as it is an interpersonal process. Meaning is not an individual creation but the result of applying to the text operations and conventions which constitute the institution of literature.

What all this means is that the personal element in the creation and reception of literary texts has to be put in proper perspective so that we can give a clearer picture of what it is that happens in the literary discourse situation. In arguing that literary texts, like all other (non-literary) texts are "socially-situated" discourse and should therefore be studied as such (Fowler, 1981:19), the sociolinguistic approach to the study of literary discourse puts literature in the mainstream of language use in general, a view which corresponds to the stand taken in this study.

1.3.2.3 Factors Conditioning the Reception of the Literary Message

There are two main factors which affect the ways in which the implied reader receives the author's literary message, namely, a) the author's "mind-style", and b) the stylistic technique, or

device, of "foregrounding". With regard to a), it was made clear in the last section that it is the text—that is, the implied author — that creates the conditions, in the form of textual patterns, which enable the implied reader to achieve a rapport with the fictional world represented in it. It is the way in which these patterns are arranged and organised that constitutes the author's "mind-style" (Fowler, 1977:103-113). The term "mind-style" is typically used in literary stylistics to characterise "cumulative tendencies of stylistic choice" (Leech and Short, 1981:188) which manifest themselves either in an author's work as a whole or in only one literary text. On the other hand, however, an author's mind-style is also associated with the way in which he achieves local stylistic effects in a text. Mind-style in this connection manifests itself in, for instance, "any distinctive linguistic presentation of an individual mental self" (Fowler, 1977:103). In whatever sense we may view it, therefore, the author's mind-style is the creative principle controlling the way in which he presents the fictional world he has created: it realises his minority view of reality in the text. In other words, the author's mind-style is the principle behind the creation of the role which the real reader is expected to play in the text. He can only play this role to the extent that he recognises this mind-style of the author. And he can only recognise the mind-style in stages: his awareness of the distinctive patterns in the text can only develop gradually as he goes through the text. This is the sense in which the notion of dominant structure is significant for literary stylistics. Literary texts take place "in fictional time, and build up through time a dominant structure" (Cluysenaar, 1977:101) which acquires its significance in the text

as a result of its having the effect of forcing the reader to notice it. A dominant structure has this effect on the reader as a result of the persistently systematic manner in which it occurs in the text.

When a structure stands out in this way in the text, it is said to be "foregrounded". Foregrounding, in the way Jan Mukařovský (1970: 40-56) defines it, is related to the factor of deviation from linguistic and literary norms; deviation in turn constitutes a deautomatisation of familiar linguistic and literary patterns. From this point of view, foregrounding is the opposite of automatisisation: "automatization schematizes an event; foregrounding means the violation of the scheme" (Mukařovský, 1970:43) In spite of this factor, however, foregrounding typically occurs in the same linguistic environment with automatisisation, since the unfamiliar can only be described as such in relation to the familiar. It therefore operates against the dual backgrounds of the "norm of the standard language and the traditional esthetic canon" (*Ibid.*, page 46). Furthermore (and this is the important point for this study), foregrounding is characterised by consistency and a systematic nature.

The systematic foregrounding of components in a work of poetry consists in the gradation of the interrelationships of these components, that is, in their mutual subordination and superordination. The component highest in the hierarchy becomes the dominant. All other components, foregrounded or not, as well as their interrelationships are evaluated from the standpoint of the dominant. The dominant is that component of the work which sets in motion, and gives direction to, the relationships of all other components.

(Mukařovský, 1970:45)

Thus, foregrounding is also seen in terms of dominance: when there is a consistent pattern to deviation in a literary text, it acquires the quality of dominance.²⁴

But there is also foregrounding of the non-deviation type in which a structure acquires significance in the text as a result of the fact that it makes use of a certain aspect of the language or literary norms in such a consistent and systematic manner that it thrusts itself, as it were, on the reader. There are no violations of linguistic rules or literary principles involved here. For example, it is quite common to see recurring in poetry the repetition of syntactic patterns; this is the notion of "syntactical parallelism" (Leech, 1969:62-69).

The important point about foregrounding from the point of view of this study, then, is that whatever form it may take, it is its connection with the notion of dominance that is crucial for literary interpretation. In this regard, Halliday's definition of the concept (Halliday, 1973:112) is pertinent:

Foregrounding ...is prominence that is motivated. It is not difficult to find patterns of prominence in a poem or prose text, regularities in the sounds or words or structures that stand out in some way, or may be brought out by careful reading; and one may often be led in this way towards a new insight, through finding that such prominence contributes to the writer's total meaning. But unless it does, it will seem to lack motivation; a feature that is brought into prominence will be 'foregrounded' only if it relates to the meaning of

²⁴ A much quoted example of this phenomenon in literary stylistic circles, with respect to prose fiction, is the consistently and systematically deviant use of certain elements of transitivity in clause structure in William Golding's The Inheritors. See Halliday's excellent study of the subject, in Halliday (1973:103-143).

the text as a whole....

This functional definition of foregrounding agrees in principle with Mukařovský's view of the concept; it is also in conformity with Cluysenaar's treatment of it. She equates it with dominance and vice versa by using the two terms as synonyms (for example, "Dominance or 'foregrounding.'" (Cluysenaar, 1977:63).

In view of the foregoing, the notion of foregrounding as motivated prominence is connected with that of functional difficulty, which is discussed in the next chapter. Thus, the distinctions made between motivated and unmotivated prominence on the one hand and between functional and non-functional difficulty on the other touch upon the important issue of relevance or validity in literary interpretation (see Hirsch, 1967).

The point about literary texts "taking place in time and building up in time a dominant structure" is linked to the issue of the linearity of text which was discussed earlier. We become aware of a prominent structure as we proceed along the linear dimension in the text and organise our meaning-achieving activity around that structure, eventually arriving at an overall meaning for the text through the fusion (or non-fusion as the case may be) of the mental images which we have built up in the course of our reading.

In building up those mental images, we also have expectations which are either fulfilled, amended or rejected altogether as we proceed along the linear dimension of the text. One way in which our expectations are aroused by the text is through the use of personal reference either at the beginning of poems or novels; or through the way it is used to introduce new characters at various points in

the novel. For instance, pronouns and deictics - especially the definite article the - are very often used cataphorically²⁵ in literary texts, with the effect that the reader's attention is projected towards what is to come. This type of reference makes the reader want to read on to see if these expectations are going to be fulfilled or not (Widdowson, 1975:63ff., especially 66). But he does not only want to read on: he also looks back during his reading in order to assess the validity of his developing response to the relevant text. Thus, in the course of the reading process, the reader arrives not just at one interpretation of, or hypothesis about, what the text is all about, but at a series of interpretations, hypotheses and conclusions. It is in this sense that reading is a dynamic process - which means that the relationship between the implied author and the reader (or between the text and the implied reader) is a dynamic type of relationship. The reader cannot therefore be passive: he must actively co-operate with the author to re-create the meaning of the latter's text.

1.4 CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion has established, in broad terms, that since literature is an instance of language in use, it cannot but be discussed against the background of other, non-literary, uses of language. Thus, while literary discourse is distinct from non-literary discourse in

²⁵ "Cataphora" is the form of presupposition which points forward to either a grammatical or lexical item that is yet to come in the relevant text. When the pointing is to an item that has gone before, we have "anaphora". Both anaphora and cataphora are situationally specific types of reference. There is, however, another type of reference which does not depend on the specific situation; this type of reference is called "homophoric" reference. See Halliday and Hasan (1976)

certain respects, it has its roots firmly in the non-literary discourse situation. This conclusion is supported by the fact that although the author's projected vision of reality is different from reality as we know and describe it, the fictional world which he creates has its basis in the real world. His use of linguistic as well as literary patterns is thus an attempt to say something unconventional; but the unconventional has to have a logical relationship with the conventional. It is because of this logical relationship with the conventional and familiar that we concede the "reality" of literature. The literary discourse situation, then, is different from the non-literary discourse situation mainly in the sense that an author does not communicate directly with whoever might happen to read his texts. Rather, it is a projected version of him (that is, the implied author) which directly addresses a projected version of the reader (the implied reader) in the text. The implied reader gets to know the implied author's message by accepting the role which the latter has mapped out for him in the text. When he does this he achieves - to a greater or lesser extent - an identity of viewpoint with the author, thus interpreting and evaluating the contents of the fiction in an appropriate way (Leech and Short, 1981: 257).

One relevant question which emerges from the preceding discussion with regard to the interpretation of Soyinka's The Interpreters is, How do the various parts of the novel cohere in view of the major disruption of normal time sequence manifested in it? Related to this question is that of dominant structure in the text: which are the foregrounded linguistic and literary patterns in the novel, and in what way are they thematically related to each other? Applications of the principles cited in this Chapter will be used to answer these questions in the five chapters which follow.

CHAPTER 2

MAJOR CONCERNS EMERGING FROM THE INTERPRETERS¹

2.1 GENERAL

The fictional world represented in The Interpreters is a world which is undergoing a difficult and crucial transition from a basically traditional African society to a modern Western-type mass society. As a result of this factor, there is cultural tension: the norms of the traditional Culture (Culture T) are in contention with those of the Western (European and American) Culture (Culture W), without one set of norms being able to push the other completely aside. Thus, while the co-existence of the two sets of norms cannot be described as peaceful, the relationship between them is definitely a dynamic one.

Neither of the Cultures can dislodge the other because they are equally powerful. And because they are both forces to reckon with, there is mass disorientation in the society of the novel, because the people portrayed in it are torn between them: they are being pulled in two directions at once, with the result that they have become culturally ambiguous. Their lives are therefore characterised by chaos and disorder. This cultural ambiguity is manifested most strongly in the text through the five interpreters, who are the principal characters in The Interpreters: Egbo, Sagoe, Kola, Sekoni (or "Sheikh") and Bandele. These are relatively young Nigerians who as young adults have all been educated abroad and who have returned to Nigeria to live and work after the completion of their studies. But they find that the process of living is not an easy one, for their cultural ambiguity prevents them from

¹ All references to The Interpreters in this thesis are to the 1978 Heinemann edition.

living a meaningful existence.

They find, for instance, that their ambiguous situation tends to make them live a futile existence, so that they live, figuratively, "on the creek-surface" (a metaphor more fully examined in the first section of Chapter 6 of this thesis²), unable to penetrate to the deeper meaning of life. If they are to lead meaningful lives and have a sense of certainty and purpose, they must escape from the creek-surface and explore the depths beneath it.

It is not, however, easy or, indeed, possible to be released from the creek-surface for the main reason that it is extremely difficult to do away with the sense of ambiguity which is so oppressive to the interpreters. For instance, escaping from the creek-surface involves their striking a balance between Culture T and Culture W. But this is not an easy thing to do: precisely because the two Cultures are equally powerful, they both have attractions for the individual. These attractions are traps, for they constitute a bait to lure the careless individual into the illusion of a comfortable way out of the baffling problems of existence. To swallow that bait is to lead a life characterised by futility and meretriciousness, and, therefore, to continue "happily" through life on the creek-surface.

The people who present this unpleasant picture in the novel fall into two main groups. On the one hand are Professor Oguazor and his wife Caroline and the Board members of a Lagos newspaper; and on the other Joe Golder, the American lecturer in African History. The Oguazors and the Board members have embraced the material benefits

² See The Interpreters, Chapter 1, p. 13 for Egbo's use of this metaphor.

offered by Culture W so as to boost their own egos and consolidate their privileged position in their society. Golder, on the other hand, has allowed himself to be caught up in the hollow protestation of Negritudist romanticism, with its emphasis on the so-called innocence and simplicity of the African past and on the presumed beauty of the black skin. These two positions are extreme ones and are not therefore useful in the search for a sense of certainty.

The useful position to take is to strike a balance between Cultures T and W and not to get taken in by the attractions offered by either of them. In order to strike this balance, one needs to be able to confront issues realistically, that is, critically. The problem for the interpreters, however, is that the striking of a balance between the two Cultures is, in the context of the fictional world depicted in the text, an ideal, the achievement of which is made virtually impossible by the demands made on them by what elements of Culture T remain in the cosmopolitan society depicted in the novel. Furthermore, they find it difficult to strike a balance between Cultures T and W because, by doing so, they would unravel the deeper meaning of life. It is actually this deeper meaning of life they are after. But the text suggests that this deeper meaning, or certainty, or "core" constitutes knowledge of the mysteries of life which is the prerogative of the gods.

The dilemma of the interpreters, then, is that the best they can ever hope for is to have glimpses of this knowledge, which is very unsatisfactory indeed. For only having glimpses of such knowledge means that they have simply left one ambiguous situation for another, in that they are, metaphorically speaking, dangling between heaven and earth, between humanity and the supernatural without their clearly

being one thing or the other. The result is that the factor of ambiguity, a void and chaos will always remain with them. This is the reason underlying their frustration in the text.

A reader just starting to read The Interpreters for the first time would probably be led at first by the title of the novel to expect to read about certain people who function as "interpreters" - in the sense of translators. Or he may be led to think that the noun interpreters is referring to diviners - that is, people who claim to tell of the future by interpreting signs. After his first reading of the novel, however, he will come to realise that the title refers to a group of young Nigerians who are trying to disentangle the many problems of existence that confront them by seeking to clarify their response to the happenings in the society in which they live. This task has become necessary in view of the fact that these young people, like the other people depicted in the society of the novel, have become disoriented as a result of the clash of Cultures T and W, which was discussed in the last section. The method which they have adopted in their endeavour to find some order in the ever deepening chaos around them is to interpret the events which they witness in their society in the light of their own experience; that is, the experience of life which they have acquired both in that society and from outside it. In doing this, they widen and deepen that experience. In analysing and interpreting the events which they witness in their society, however, the interpreters must take care not to allow their own prejudices or selfish considerations to colour the way in which they see those events. This is the point that Bandele is making when he says in the Lazarus Church scene that in creating their own

myths, Sagoo, Kola and Egbo should not "carelessly promote another's", which could even be more harmful than theirs (Chapter 12, page 178).

2.2 THE DISCOURSE SITUATION OF THE INTERPRETERS

As was mentioned in the Introduction to this discussion of The Interpreters, the group of interpreters referred to in the text are five in number: Egbo, Civil Servant; Sagoe, journalist; Kola, art lecturer; Sekoni or Sheikh, qualified engineer and later, sculptor; and Bandele, lecturer in economics.³ This group of characters is the main group. At the other end of the scale is a much larger group which, in fact, includes the rest of the society of the novel at large. But the text has been written from the interpreters' point of view, because it is they who embody positive qualities in the text, in that it is they who are seriously trying to confront their ambiguous situation realistically.

³ I have not included Lasunwon in this group for reasons which will be made explicit later (Chapter 5). It is important to stress this point in view of the fact that certain critics seem unable to make up their minds as to the exact number of the principal characters in The Interpreters. Eustace Palmer, for instance, vacillates between five and six: "The novel starts with all five or six interpreters... (Palmer, 1979:242). Furthermore, in his "Introduction" to the 1978 edition of The Interpreters, Eldred Jones refers to "the five friends" and then goes on in the same breath to mention six, tagging on "Lasunwon, lawyer" at the end of the list (p.2). Elsewhere (Jones, 1973:156 ff.), Jones uses the terms "interpreters" and "the new generation" interchangeably, with the result that it is not easy to see whether he regards the two female characters - Dehinwa and the unnamed undergraduate - as "interpreters", too, or as part of a new generation of Nigerians, a generation to which the "interpreters" also belong. Similarly, Emmanuel Obiechina uses the term "main characters" to refer to the five friends named above as well as Lasunwon (whom I have excluded) and the three female characters - Dehinwa, Monica Faseyi and Mrs Faseyi (senior) and probably the unnamed undergraduate - all of whom he regards as "the women equivalents of the interpreters" (Obiechina, 1975:111; also p.110). The term "interpreters", then, is to be understood as referring to the five characters mentioned above any time it is used in this work unless otherwise specified.

Sekoni will be referred to in this thesis as "Sheikh" to distinguish him from his father, Alhaji Sekoni.

In this connection, Soyinka's⁴ attitude to his subject-matter and the characters portrayed in the text cannot be divorced from the perspective from which the story of the novel has been written. This factor demonstrates how closely the notion of point of view in fiction (or fictional point of view) on the one hand and that of discorsal point of view on the other are related to each other. Fictional point of view refers simply to the perspective from which a particular novel has been written, the angle from which the story of the fiction has been told (Fowler, 1977:72). In this respect, the relevant fictional world is slanted "towards 'reality' as apprehended by a particular participant, or set of participants, in the fiction" (Leech and Short, 1981:174). Discorsal point of view, on the other hand, refers to the attitude which the author has adopted towards the characters and the subject-matter, in the fiction, and which he wishes should be adopted by the reader so that he could establish a rapport with the text, thus interpreting the fiction in an appropriate way (Fowler, 1977:75-78; and Leech and Short, 1981:272-287). It is in this sense that discorsal point of view can be described as "the relationship, expressed through discourse structure, between the implied author or some other addresser, and the fiction" (Leech and Short, *ibid.*, page 272). Thus, in addition to Soyinka's having written The Interpreters from the points of view (fictional point of view) of the interpreters, his attitude to them (discorsal point of view)

⁴All references to Soyinka from this point onwards are to be understood as referring to the projected version of the real Soyinka which emerges from The Interpreters. - that is, Soyinka as implied author - except if otherwise stated.

is also positive.

As a result of the foregoing, it is largely through the eyes of the interpreters, especially those of Sagoe, that we see the rest of the society depicted in the novel. In this connection, therefore, it is not simply that Soyinka predominantly uses the third-person narrative technique in The Interpreters, which he does, but that he narrates events and describes situations mainly from the various interpreters' points of view. There is thus a co-operative venture between him and the interpreters in the text. This co-operation is manifested in the form of the narrative techniques of free indirect style - or represented speech and thought -, of represented perception, or of the fusion of the two devices. The most notable examples of the use of all three devices are to be found in Sagoe-centred passages in the text. This is mainly due to the fact that it is largely through Sagoe's eyes that the futility of the fictional world depicted in the text has been exposed.

The rest of that fictional world is not, however, simply made up of people who "happily" embody the futility that so basically characterises their society; it also contains certain characters in whom the interpreters see themselves, in the sense that these people, too, are trying in their own ways to cope with the challenges of life. Chief among these characters is Lazarus the beach prophet and, to a lesser extent, Joe Golder, the American lecturer in African History at the university college in Ibadan; also the unnamed girl student whom Egbo seduces.

Each of the three groups of characters referred to above - that of the interpreters, that of the people in the society of the novel at large and that of Lazarus and Golder - are related to certain themes or



a certain theme-constellation in the novel. But the dominant structure which emerges from the text, and which "sets in motion, and gives direction to, the relationship" (Mukařovský, 1970:45) of the other thematically significant stylistic and linguistic devices in The Interpreters, is that of the fragmentation of narrative sequence. It is therefore with a study of the structural design of the novel that my discussion of it begins.

2.3 THE READER AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE INTERPRETERS

It is not difficult to see that The Interpreters is not an easy novel to read. One reason for this is that it has exploited to fairly good effect the fact that the reading process is never a smooth affair. Normally, as was pointed out in Chapter 1 above, reading is characterised by a process of anticipation and retrospection which the reader engages in all the time while reading. Because the structures of the text cause his viewpoint to move forwards and backwards in the text all the time, therefore, the reader's experience of the text is bound to be at first fragmentary in nature - until he works out an overall meaning for it. It is this fragmentary nature of the reading process that has been substantially exploited in The Interpreters. As a result of this factor, the reader's mental activities vis-à-vis the novel take a long time to settle into any consistent pattern.

It is therefore not surprising that most readers and critics of The Interpreters are continually frustrated by it, with the result that it has earned the "distinction" of being "difficult". For instance, Eustace Palmer (1979:241) claims to be "articulating the responses of hosts of intelligent readers who find the "language and structure" of the novel not just difficult but rather affected". Similarly,

Oladele Taiwo (1976:XVI) talks of the "problem of the structure of the novel" but does not state what this problem is. He also talks of "the tendency on Soyinka's part merely to compound words at the expense of meaning and a certain diffusiveness which makes the whole work tedious even to the patient reader". He also fails to substantiate this assertion in any way. In addition to Taiwo's failure to justify his statement concerning The Interpreters, his use of those statements as his reasons for leaving a consideration of the novel out of his book, Culture and the Nigerian Novel, is unacceptable. For since the novelists he studies in the book have "represented the link between indigenous culture and modern experience..." (ibid., page xiv), and since The Interpreters is very much concerned with the search for a meaningful relationship between "indigenous culture and modern experience" (See Chapter 6 below), I see no reason why the novel should not qualify for even a brief discussion in the said book.⁵

The implication of all this is that the issue of the "difficulty" of The Interpreters has to be put in proper perspective. From this point of view, the question we should be asking is to what extent the "difficulty" of the novel is functional and to what extent it is not. For, as Wayne Booth (1961:303) has put it,

The reader's problem is that of discriminating between genuinely functional difficulty and obscurities that spring from carelessness, false pride, or plain ineptitude. To praise a difficulty - whether it makes us work or not - that results simply from the author's own failure to

⁵ Obiechina (1975), whose book deals with the same issues as Taiwo's does, does consider The Interpreters in some detail.

write his work is as fatal to the critic and the reader as to condemn a difficulty that is actually a necessary part of the whole.⁶

It is therefore desirable and useful to examine the notion of "difficulty" in relation to the way in which the major themes of The Interpreters have been structurally and linguistically realised in the text. This is the most fruitful way of ascertaining which aspects of the difficulty of the novel are functional and which are not.

2.3.1 The Main Structural Pattern Foregrounded in The Interpreters

The structural pattern that is most obviously foregrounded in The Interpreters is the fragmentation of narrative sequence. This effect of fragmentation has been achieved through the frequent interruption of the narration of one particular incident by that of another, and through the juxtaposition of descriptions of events in the past and in the fictional present. As this latter factor suggests, there are thus in the text spatiotemporal shifts to places and incidents a) within the fictional present, and b) in the past, with the result that there is a dislocation of normal time sequence in the text.

⁶ See also p. 302: "The trouble with most talk about good and bad of asking the reader to decipher - usually under terms like 'difficulty', 'obscurity', 'complexity' or 'allusiveness' - is that it is entirely general, as if there were some abstract law which says that this or that degree of difficulty is too much or too little..."

One main cause of the "difficulty" of literary texts is the author's anxiety to "escape from banality" (Leech, 1969:23), or from what George Steiner has characterised as the "infinitely shop-worn inventory of speech, with the necessarily devalued or counterfeit currency of the every-day. He [the author] must literally create new words and syntactic modes If the reader would follow the poet into the terra incognita of revelation, he must learn the language" (Steiner, 1978:263). In other words, the author is always trying to exploit the linguistic fact that the range of potential meanings available in a language to a user of that language is inexhaustible (see also Chapter 1 above).

With respect to b) above, there are two types of "pastness" in The Interpreters: (i) a recent past, which I shall henceforth refer to as Past A; and (ii) a more remote past - Past B. Past A refers to that period in the narrative past which comes after the return of the interpreters to Nigeria from abroad, but before the actual story of the novel begins. Past B, on the other hand, refers to that period in the past which antedates the departure of the five interpreters for Europe and the United States to study. There is yet another aspect to the past in the text, from the structural point of view: This is the period that covers the interpreters' stay abroad. But because we know very little about this past - there are only short references to it, all in connection with Sagoe (an experience he once had in Seattle - page 63; his encounter with a New York policeman - page 68; his taking of the two hiking French students to his arboreal retreat in France - pages 96-97; his experience of sexual perversion in the United States - page 199) - it does not contribute to the development of the narrative in any significant manner. I have therefore not considered it along with Past A and Past B.

Furthermore, since the spatiotemporal shifts to the past constitute an interruption of the sequence of events in the narrative present, and in order to show what it is that is being fragmented, I shall first discuss the sequence of events in the present before considering the thematic function of the dislocation of normal time sequence in the text.

There are three main types of chapters in The Interpreters in relation to the narrative present of the novel: a) there are those chapters that carry forward the story in the fictional present without containing flashbacks to either Past A or Past B; for example, Chapters 8 (pages 113-119), 11 (pages 155-164), 12 (pages 164-182), 16 (pages 224-234), 17 (pages 234-238) and 18 (pages 238-251). Chapters 11, 12, 16, 17 and 18 are in Part Two of the text. b) There are also those chapters which carry forward the "present" story but which have flashbacks to Past A and, further, to Past B embedded within them. Some of these are Chapter 7 (pages 103-113) - with a flashback to Past A which describes briefly Sagoe and Dehinwa's visit to the latter's grandmother at Ifo (page 106); Chapter 9 (pages 119-134) - with a longer flashback to Past B, to the continued description of Egbo's first love-making session with Simi the prostitute and the immediate aftermath of that event (pages 123-127); Chapter 15 (pages 218-224) with a short flashback to the fight which the interpreters had with Okonje the waiter, in Past B⁷ at the Mayoni Club in Ibadan (page 219). c) Finally, there are other Chapters in The Interpreters which are ambiguous as to their chronological relationship to the temporal mainstream of the story. These are, notably, Chapters 9, 11, 13 (pages 183-201) and 14 (pages 201-218).

⁷ Eldred Jones (1973:159) has, surprisingly, wrongly timed this fight. After referring to the opening scene of The Interpreters (pp. 7-8) he goes on to talk of this fight as "a later brawl". But it is explicitly stated in the novel that the fight "was several years before the Wrestler, before they all left the country and scattered over the face of the Western World" (p. 220 of text) - underlining mine. This statement effectively puts the fight within the time covered by Past B in the text.

In essence, what happens in the present of The Interpreters is this. In Part One, the five interpreters, who have all been reunited after periods of university or college education abroad, are in the habit of meeting fortnightly at weekends. The meetings alternate between the Club Cambana in Lagos and the university campus (notably Bandele's house on the campus) at Ibadan. The two interpreters in Lagos, Egbo and Sagoe, go over to Ibadan to meet their three friends - Bandele, Kola and "Sheikh" (Sekoni) - there. The "Ibadan group" also go over to Lagos to meet Egbo and Sagoe - as well as Dehinwa (Sagoe's fiancée) and Lasunwon. For instance, the story of the novel opens in the present, in Part One, Chapter 1, with the description of a scene at the Club Cambana in which (scene) we see all the five interpreters - as well as Dehinwa and Lasunwon - relaxing at the Club. Similarly, very early in Part Two of the text, we again see the friends at the Club a fortnight after the funeral of Sheikh (Chapter 11, pages 157 ff.). Furthermore, we also see the friends in Bandele's house on the university college campus in Ibadan in Chapter 9, where Egbo meets Bandele's unnamed second-year girl student for the first and last time. And we again see the friends in Bandele's house in the last Chapter of the novel in the episode in which Bandele has a major disagreement with Egbo, which is triggered off by Bandele's refusal to supply the identity of the girl student referred to above (Chapter 18, pages 238-251).

The events of the opening episode of the novel take place in the small hours of a Monday morning - the day of the funeral of Sir Derinola, Sagoe's newspaper Chairman employer. Attending that funeral in the late afternoon after a morning of hangovers and

hallucinations (Chapter 5, pages 64-66 and 68), Sagoe meets for the first time the albino beach prophet Lazarus, who is conducting the funeral of his late Apostle, Brother Ezra (Chapter 7, pages 103-113). Sagoe forgets this encounter until a fortnight later when he again meets Lazarus, in Chapter 8, this time as the saviour of (the body of⁸) "Barabbas", a street-thief pursued to the danger of his life by the Oyingbo mob.

In the course of the text we learn, from embedded flashbacks and from chronologically ambiguous chapters, about the past - distant and more immediate - of most of the central characters. We learn, for instance, of Sheikh's terrible professional fate which leads to mental illness (Chapter 1, pages 29-31; and 6, pages 98-99); and of his discovery of himself as a sculptor (also Chapter 6 pages 99-100). We learn, too, of Egbo's adolescent obsession with the beautiful and mysterious Ibadan courtesan Simi, who not only initiates him into the mysteries of sex but becomes and remains his mistress. The story of their first encounter is told in Chapter 4, pages 50-60 - which is a self-contained Chapter - and in the embedded flashback in Chapter 9, pages 123-127, which is a continuation of the story begun in Chapter 4. We also learn in the course of the text of the growing but largely tacit attraction to each other felt by Kola, who is working on his Pantheon of Yoruba gods and who needs Usaye (a little albino girl) as a model for the handmaiden to Obaluwaiye⁹,

⁸Lazarus is to fail to save "barabbas's, now "Noah's" soul later in the story. See Chapter 6 below.

⁹The "respectful name for Sopona, god of smallpox. (Glossary in The Interpreters. p. 259)

and the wife of a friend and colleague of his, Ayo Faseyi an X-ray analyst on the campus (Chapters 3, 14, 16 and 18).

Chapter 9 sees Egbo's sudden and impulsive infidelity to Simi and his disastrous seduction of the girl student referred to earlier (in May - page 134) who is presumably facing her B.A. Intermediate examinations the following month (June). Chapter 10 records the event of the Oguazor party, which takes place during the examination season at the university college campus in Ibadan - very probably in June. Sagoe is up from Lagos and stays with Bandele, who also has another guest (Peter Wall, a German-American journalist), and misbehaves in a hilariously satirical way, mocking not only Pinkshore, a born expatriate target for his (Sagoe's) wit, but the whole Oguazor household manners. Monica Faseyi also misbehaves in a more serious way by flouting the stuffy post-colonial conventions of Mrs Oguazor. The end of Chapter 10 also sees the end of Part One of The Interpreters.

However, the juncture of Parts One and Two creates a major discrepancy in the structural design of the novel. At the beginning of Part Two, Sheikh dies in a car crash, which we are led to believe takes place in July (Part Two, Chapter 11, page 155), after students have left the Ibadan campus. But the second Faseyi household luncheon party (from which only Sagoe and Sheikh are absent), which seems to follow immediately after the Oguazor party, also leads to an interlude on the same day between Joe Golder (a homosexual American quadron) - Chapter 14. In that interlude, it is clear that Sheikh has been dead for some undefined period and that Kola is arranging a commemorative exhibition of all Sheikh's works, the sale proceedings of which are to go entirely to the sculptor's widow and child (pages 217-218). This raises the problem of when it is that Sheikh actually dies. This

problem will be discussed fully at the end of this section of this thesis.

Still in Part Two of The Interpreters , after a week or more of grief-stricken mourning for Sheikh, the remaining four friends, reassemble at the Club Cambana in Lagos and are suddenly confronted by Lazarus, who has tracked down Sagoe to the Club. There he tells them the story of his sudden death as a black man and his astonishing resurrection the next day as an albino, as well as something about the Church he has founded as a result of this strange experience (Chapter 11, pages 157-162).

Partly out of curiosity but also because Sheikh's death has made them think seriously about mortality and the meaning of their lives, they all agree to go to Lazarus's Church a week later. There they participate in a service in which "Barabbas", now "Noah", is symbolically inducted as an Apostle by washing the feet of the congregation. Later that night, "Noah" fails an ordeal by fire and water, destroying Lazarus's hopes of him as a leader of his Church (Chapter 5). "Noah's" failure does not, however, destroy Lazarus's concern for him as a human being (Chapter 16). "Noah" is to pose for Kola's Pantheon as Esumare the rainbow. "Noah" and Lazarus therefore go to Ibadan with the friends, but Kola sees "Noah's" unsuitability for the role of Esumare. He therefore substitutes the albino, Lazarus, as the model for Esumare in the picture (Chapter 16, page 227)

Within a day or two, "Noah" is killed by a fall from Joe Golder's top-floor flat while fleeing from the American's homosexual advances. Golder's friends - Bandele and Kola - rally round him and the cause of "Noah's" death is effectively "hushed up" (Chapter 17). Golder recovers sufficiently to have the bad taste to plan to sing a requiem (for "Noah") to aid his Vacation Concert performance.

By now Egbo, to whom Simi remains faithful, has learned about the pregnancy of the girl student he seduced (Chapter 18, page 242). This knowledge and the realisation that he cannot simply abandon either Simi or the girl student deepens his recurrent feeling of frustration, which leads him to alienate himself from his friends (page 243). Similarly, Bandele, too, gradually but surely alienates himself from Kola, Egbo and Sagoe as a direct result of "Noah's" untimely death (page 243). He becomes more sarcastic and increasingly irritated by his friends (page 244), and eventually curses a group of people at the Vacation Concert, which (group) includes Professor Oguazor and, significantly, Egbo. The result of all this is that the solidarity which has characterised the group of "interpreters" for most of the story breaks down and the friends effectively split up - perhaps permanently ("... Kola held her [Monica's] hand, admitting, it is a night of severance, every man is going his way" - page 245).

2.3.2 A Major Problem Arising from the Sequencing of Events in the Present

A passing reference was made above to a major discrepancy arising from the way in which The Interpreters has been structured. The central problem here relates to the timing of Sheikh's death in the novel. It is very clear that the incidents recorded in Chapter 14 of the text take place the day following the Oguazor party - the account of which is recorded in Chapter 10. The clearest indication of this is to be found in the description of one important aspect of Ayo Faseyi's behaviour. For instance, any time his wife "misbehaves" in public, he wastes no time before inviting Bandele to lunch for the purpose of hearing from him any adverse comments that might have been

made on his wife's lack of social grace. Thus, when Monica drinks palm-wine instead of champagne at the Embassy reception (Chapter 3, page 42), Ayo does not waste any time in complaining to Bandele and in inviting him and Kola to his house for lunch the following afternoon. This sort of reaction on the part of Ayo Faseyi, Bandele tells us, is typical:

'He included you in the invitation . In fact more you than me. You don't know Fash. He has to know what else you heard and it won't wait.'

'Well I heard nothing, so he can forget it.' [This from Kola]

'His mother is coming -you'll soon get to know the pattern. After a scene like this he sends for his mother to talk to Monica' '

(page 47)

Similarly, Monica has again misbehaved at the Oguazor party (Chapter 10, pages 143-145) and, again, her husband wastes no time in complaining to Bandele and (presumably) inviting the economics lecturer as well as Egbo and Kola to lunch the following day. They duly honour the invitation and Ayo immediately launches into his usual and predictable litany of complaints:

'I didn't sleep all night you know. In fact I am so glad you could come. Mummy is all very well - I went to fetch her first thing this morning - but one can really only talk with people of one's own age...'

(page 203)

Ayo's complaint that he didn't sleep "all night" and his stating that he went to fetch his mother first thing in the morning fit very well into the pattern of his behaviour on such occasions. First, Monica misbehaves in public, then there is an "after-crisis lunch" (Chapter 14, page 201) at the Faseyis' the following day which Ayo himself arranges

so that he could learn about people's reactions to his wife's violations of social conventions.

But if the second after-crisis lunch at the Faseyis' takes place on the afternoon following the Oguazor party, the question arises as to the exact time of the first meeting between Sagoe and Joe Golder (Chapter 13). The impression which Soyinka wants us to have about the said meeting is that it takes place a few days after the Oguazor party (Chapter 10). For instance, early in Chapter 13, the author states:

For days now Pinkshore had aroused his [Sagoe's] dislike of white faces. Not even the memory of Mrs Faseyi's defiant form, contemptuous of the embarrassment of her own people and indifferent to the shock and indignation of her husband's, not even she could redeem the white race since that party...

(page 183)

Then, at the end of the chapter, Sagoe sarcastically thanks Bandele for "a most eventful stay" (page 201), which means he has been in Ibadan for some days and is now about to return to Lagos. Furthermore, Sagoe remarks at one point in his lengthy conversation with Golder that he "saw a white girl [Monica] at a party the other night" (that is, the Oguazor party night - page 196).

At the same time, however, there is a nagging suspicion in one's mind as to the effect that the meeting in question takes place immediately after Sagoe's unceremonious departure from the Oguazor party (Chapter 10, pages 151-152). For instance, Sagoe tells Golder that he is on the campus of the university college in Ibadan for "a few days" (page 196) - not that he has been. This seems to suggest that Sagoe is still in the early stages - probably the first day - of his visit to Bandele. In addition, Soyinka remarks at one point in

Chapter 13 that "Sagoe was sure he was having more than his share of a night's annoyance" (page 197), which the evidence in that Chapter suggests started with Peter, then the "native breed" - that is, Professor Oguazor and his mates - , followed by "that Golder character" (page 201).

This observation is borne out by the fact that Sagoe arrives at Bandele's house on the same day as the Oguazor party (Chapter 10 page 135), and that he is immediately confronted by Peter Wall, whose manners he finds distasteful (pages 135-139). He therefore decides to go with Bandele to the Oguazor party, even though he has not been invited to it:

In the garage Bandele stopped. 'You are sure you want to go to the party?'

'Anything to get away from Peter. God, in five minutes that man reduced me to an apprehensive jelly.'

(page 139)

So, Sagoe gate-crashes the Oguazor party, bluffs his way through it and ends up being rude to the host and hostess as well as Pinkshore, whom he causes to faint by throwing a plastic lemon at him, striking him on the mouth (pages 151-152). He then beats a hasty retreat from the party and walks back to Bandele's house from which a light warns him that Peter might ^{not} have gone to bed (Chapter 13, page 183). The memory of the German-American's eccentric behaviour earlier that day still haunts him ("Peter might be asleep but he could hear him rushing down the moment the door was opened to ask about his health or suggest a nightcap together ..." page 183). It is these doubts that make Sagoe linger on the doorstep where he is accosted by the restless

Joe Golder. Grateful again at the opportunity to get away from Peter (page 196) Sagoe goes with Golder to his top-floor flat where Golder unsuccessfully persuades him to spend the night. The American then drives him back to Bandele's house in the small hours of the morning, when Sagoe makes the sarcastic comment referred on page 63.

The implication of all this is that the timing of the events recorded in Chapter 13 is not as clear as it should be. This issue becomes even more confusing when we try to relate this Chapter to Chapter 14. If, for instance, Sagoe first meets Golder on his first night with Bandele, and if the second after-crisis lunch at the Faseyis' takes place on the afternoon of the day following the Oguazor party - which is also the day of Sagoe's arrival on the campus for a few days' visit - why does he not attend that lunch with his friends? The reason would most probably be that he has by this time returned to Lagos. What we know for certain is that he knew he would not be able to go to the Faseyis' for lunch, and that is why he sent a message to Monica through Kola in which he eulogistically described her as the "Unknown Warrior of Oguazor's Cemetery" (page 206) in recognition of her refusal to fall in with Mrs Oguazor's insistence on the post-colonial convention of the ladies' retiral.

It is this second luncheon party at the Faseyis' that is most directly related to the issue of the timing of Sheikh's death which was raised above. Immediately after that lunch, at which Mrs Faseyi (Senior) gives him a rather bad time, Kola goes back to his studio to paint Usaye, but is visited by Golder, who wants to buy Sheikh's wood-sculpture "The Wrestler" (Chapter 14, page 217). Kola immediately tells him that he, Kola, is arranging to exhibit all Sheikh's work very soon,

is having it valued by someone from Lagos, and that all the money will go to Sheikh's wife. To this, Golder replies, "'He was married?'" - the past tense form indicating that Sheikh is by now dead and buried. So, on the day following the Oguazor party, Kola and Golder are already talking of Sheikh as a dead man whose sculptures must be exhibited and sold in order to provide for his widow and child. A little earlier, Monica asks Kola about his painting (page 206) and, read retrospectively in the light of Golder's question about "The Wrestler" and Kola's reply, it is clear that the exhibition is a commemorative one.

All this would mean that Sheikh had already been dead and buried before the Oguazor party. This is where the problem lies. In the first place, if Sheikh had died before the Oguazor party, Sagoe could not have been in such high spirits there or have the patience to endure Golder's self-centred neurotic chatter afterwards. If it happens between the night of the party and the lunch-party at the Faseyi household, then none of the other four can possibly have heard about it, since their behaviour is far from grief-stricken. For instance, Sagoe's message to Monica is jovial in tone, Kola is entirely obsessed with his guilty passion for Monica, Egbo is brooding on his missing undergraduate "conquest" and on student bad behaviour (pages 203-204) and Bandele is showing concern both for Ayo and for the girl-student Egbo is trying to identify. Yet that very same afternoon Kola tells Golder that all the money arising from the exhibition and sale of Sheikh's sculptures will be given to his wife and child, the obvious implication being that Sheikh is already dead ("He was married?"). Furthermore, the behaviour of the four interpreters at the Oguazor party and at the Faseyis' the following day is in sharp contrast to their reaction to Sheikh's death.

For instance, Egbo instantly rushes off to his "retreat" under the bridge at Olokemeji until the funeral is over; Sagoe retreats into "beer and vomit" for a week; Bandele has to console Sheikh's father Alhaji Sekoni; and Kola paints "blindly in spasms of grief and un-believing...." (pages 155-156).

Secondly, Soyinka states explicitly that Sheikh dies in July. Part Two of The Interpreters begins with a statement to that effect: "The rains of May become in July slit arteries of the sacrificial bull..." (Chapter 11, page 155). Then follows a description of Sheikh's death in a motor accident on the same page. The statement above clearly indicates that the rains set in in May and intensify in July. This seems to give us a possible bracket within which the whole present action takes place, with Sheikh's death and its aftermath (the Lazarus Church affair and the Vacation Concert) taking place in July or August, and the opening of the story taking place probably in April or May.

So there is a conflict between the stated time of Sheikh's death (in July) and what emerges from the dramatisation of the story told, in the fictional present, in The Interpreters. It is clear from the novel that Soyinka wants us to think of Sheikh's death as taking place after the Oguazor party and the subsequent Faseyi luncheon. In particular, he wants to highlight the anonymous girl's courage and dignity in not telling Egbo that he has made her pregnant by consoling him for the loss of his friend. Furthermore, it is reasonably clear from the text that Soyinka is using Sheikh's death as an experience that prepares the other four interpreters for the revelation of Lazarus's unique experience of having risen from the dead (pages 159-162, and Chapter 12). For instance, the four friends, as well as Dehinwa and Lasunwon, meet Lazarus a fortnight after the funeral of Sheikh (page 157);

and they attend his Church a week after that meeting - that is, three weeks after the funeral. On that day the heavy July rain causes a flood around Lazarus's Church (pages 220-224). This suggests that Sheikh dies early in July. This observation is supported by the implication that the university college in Ibadan has not closed officially for the vacation when he dies. We know this from the fact that the girl student whom Egbo seduces is most likely to have delivered her letter of condolence to Egbo herself (page 157) - in which case she may still be on the campus at the time of Sheikh's death. This would give point to the brief exchanges between Egbo and Kola which make it clear that the girl has followed Lumoye's advice to "'wait out the remaining weeks of the term and go home..." (page 147). By the time of the Oguazor party/Faseyi lunch, she has gone, Egbo having failed to realise that the vacation was so near (page 203).

Egbo asks Bandele to let him see the second year girls' essays so that he can recognise the anonymous girl's writing, which he knows from a) the essay she handed him to pass on to Bandele (pages 127-128), and b) the note of condolence with the illegible signature (pages 156-157, and 208). This would then make sense of the fact that after lunch at the Faseyis', Kola speaks of Sheikh as now dead. But even then, there is no account of the other interpreters' reaction to Sheikh's death between the end of Chapter 9 and the comic absurdities of Chapter 10. There is no hint whatever, as was suggested above, in Chapter 10 that the friends have suffered such a blow - not even when Mrs Oguazor talks about the dangers of night driving on the Lagos-Ibadan road (page 141).

Furthermore, there is definitely no doubt that Soyinka wants us to believe that the second lunch-party at the Faseyis' takes place in

July, or even early August. For instance, we know that by the time that lunch-party takes place, the campus has been emptied of students:

The face of the campus had changed, the sounds were different, the movement within it more ordered - almost in set sequences as one conference group filtered from one hall to the other and back to the gross dormitories, now sadly depopulated. Silenced now were the student rags, the vapid excrescences of national juvenalia which, appropriately named the 'Worm', or the 'Slime', outraged even the most liberal of the staff community...

(page 203)

Also, Joe Golder tells Kola later on in the Chapter in question -14- that the campus is "'nearly healthy again'", as "'The students are all gone. Every building is blissfully happy'", (page 214).

Golder's excitement is understandable: he is happy that the "students are all gone" because vacations are the only times when he is able to control his homosexual urge (page 215).

All this means that the academic session has been officially over for some time before the time of the second lunch-party at the **Faseyis'**. In view of this factor, that lunch-party must have taken place not earlier than the third week in July. But if this is so, then it means that the Oguazor party also takes place in July, since it happened just a day before the lunch-party in question. On the other hand we know that the party must have taken place in June - probably within the first two weeks of that month, but definitely during the examination period on the campus. For instance, we learn from Mrs. Oguazor at that party that examinations are going on, lectures having been over: "'I forget lectures are over in fact. Mostly exams and things

at the moment'" (page 142).

This statement implies that lectures stopped not long ago and that examinations have, therefore, just started - which would put the time at the beginning of June. But the very next day, at the lunch-party at the Faseyi residence, we are already in July and the students, who we are made to believe are still writing their examination papers have already all left the campus. This is something that is physically impossible for them to do.

In addition to the foregoing, the time given in the novel for the anonymous girl student to realise that she has become pregnant is rather short. For instance, Egbo must have slept with her in May, for she tells him later not to see her again as her "'exams are next month'" - June (page 134). Sheikh is still alive at this time:

'Perhaps now I will bring the Sheikh' [Egbo is speaking here]
 'Bring who?'
 'The Sheikh. His real name is Sekoni. He sculpts.'

(page 133)

However, Dr. Lumoye is already talking about a girl who is pregnant, a second year student, at the Oguazor party (page 147), which, as has been suggested above, takes place early in June. Since she will normally need about six to eight weeks to realise that she is pregnant, she must have conceived earlier than May - probably in April -, which would then mean that her examinations start in May. But even if we accept that this is the case, there is still a problem. We know, for instance, that the story of The Interpreters is set in the wet season, which begins about April/May and ends around August/September.

It lasts in effect for four or five months at the most. This information is even supplied in the text, in a statement by Kola to Bandele at the Embassy reception in Past A: "...The season used to be more precise. And four months at the most. Maybe five" (page 10 41).

So, again, timing of events has not been carefully worked out in The Interpreters, with the result that there is great confusion in the mind of the reader as regards the motivation for the structural design of the novel. The inevitable conclusion is that the structuring of the story told in the text is flawed in a fundamental manner. If, for instance, Sheikh dies before the Oguazor party/Faseyi lunch-party, then the behaviour of the friends at the two parties is improbable and, therefore, unconvincing from the psychological point of view. And if Soyinka's intention (as seems most likely) is to show that Sheikh dies in July, then he has overreached himself in disrupting the time-sequences in the novel.¹¹

It would seem, however, that some serious communicative purpose must underline the massive discontinuities of normal time sequence in The Interpreters, for it is scarcely conceivable that Soyinka should introduce these for no good reason. A more probable explanation is that he began with certain definite purposes in mind but became so enmeshed in his complicated time-shuttling endeavours that he could no longer clearly perceive the detailed chronology of his own developing narrative. The question therefore remains: to what point and purpose was the main sequence of events in the narrative present so radically disrupted? It is to the possible thematic functions of this time-shuttling device that I now turn.

¹⁰ There are two seasons in Nigeria: (a) the dry season (from around October to April) and the wet or rainy season (from about April/May to August/September).

¹¹ See Appendix I for the representation of the structural design of The Interpreters in tabular form.

2.3.3 Possible Thematic Functions of the Dislocation of Normal Time Sequence

It was stated earlier that some chapters in The Interpreters carry forward the story in the fictional present without containing flashbacks either to Past A or to Past B; and that some other chapters which also carry forward the "present" story have embedded within them flashbacks to Past A and, further, to Past B. The important point to note here is that quite a number of those chapters which have no flashbacks embedded in them are used also to disrupt the normal time sequence of certain events in the present. For instance, Chapters 11, 12 and 13 have been used to disrupt the normal time sequence of the events recorded in Chapter 14. Similarly, Chapters 13 and 14 have also been used to disrupt the normal sequence of the events recorded in Chapters 12 and 15 respectively, which (events) take place the same day.

Although the motivation for these temporal eccentricities on Soyinka's part is not always clear, we can safely say in view of other types of evidence offered by the text that they do give the indication that there is a time-flux theme in The Interpreters. The concept of time-flux as adopted here refers to the confused state of mind of the interpreters which is, in turn, a reflection of the turbulent state of the society of the novel (see Chapter 6 below).

In addition to being structurally realised in the novel, the element of time-flux is also expressed in more direct terms in the text. For instance, Egbo philosophises about the point in the creek at which his parents drowned in the following manner:

'Perhaps you've guessed. My parents drowned at this spot.'

The canoe began to move off.

'Your Chinese Sages would say that it is a lie of course.

How can I say my parents died at this spot when it isn't the same water here today as was here last year, or even yesterday. Or a moment ago when I spoke '

In terms of structural motivation, then, it would seem that the radical disruption of normal narrative chronology in The Interpreters is directly related to the themes of uncertainty and disorientation which pervade the whole work. Western Nigerian society and its social values as depicted in this novel, are in a state of confusion and flux. This condition is textually realised through the deliberate breaking down of the traditional concepts of story and plot in the sense that incidents described in it do not, in the main, cohere from the standpoints of sequentiality and causality (see Falk, 1971:44)¹². Consequently, sequential contiguity does not necessarily imply temporal contiguity (Cohen, 1979:53). In other words, the mere fact that two or more episodes are juxtaposed does not mean that there is necessarily any immediate semantic connection among them. In linguistic terms, this means that Soyinka has deliberately violated the basic principles on which a text is constructed - especially those of sequence and juxtaposition, both of which are important factors arising from the linear nature of texts. In this respect, both principles have to do with the way in which textual patterns are arranged so that one notion inevitably leads to another, and so that the linguistic patterns which belong together are kept together.

Because there is a breakdown of the traditional concepts of story and plot in The Interpreters, then, the reader is forced to work out for himself the connections that exist between the various parts of the novel; for there are definitely connections between them. Writing generally about the breakdown of the concepts of story and plot in prose fiction in English, David Higdon (1971:11) has this to say:

¹²The notion of plot as E.M. Forster (1927:91-109) describes it has to do with the logical sequencing of events in a story - for example, incident b will always logically follow incident a.

It is important to stress, however, that the concepts of story and plot have not been discarded altogether in The Interpreters, but that they have only been modified extensively.

Gone are the certainties of causality, before-
and-after connections, and threatening barriers;
installed in their place is ...a wildly alogical
dissonance...

The reader has definitely been forced to think again, in The
Interpreters, about the reliability of the "certainties of caus²ality"
and, by so doing to reassess his established notion of the concept of
causality. Moreover, in this way, he is compelled to undergo the
very search for meaning which is the experience of the interpreters
themselves (what sense is he to make of it all?).

A good example of the way in which the belief in the certainties
of causality has been called to question in the novel is to be found
in Chapter 5 in Soyinka's description of the interview which Sagoe
attends in the board-room of the "Independent Viewpoint" and in the way
in which he gets the job for which he has applied - that of features
writer on the paper just referred to. Chapter 5 opens on page 61 in
the present and the narration continues in that present until page
68. During the few hours covered in those pages, we learn some more
about the relationship of Sagoe and Dehinwa. But at the bottom of
page 68, we go back to what we recognise to be Past A. In a para-
graph that spans pages 68 and 69, there is a reference to Sagoe's
appearance before the Board of Interview in the "Independent View-
point" offices. But also in this same paragraph, at the top of page 69,
we see Sagoe after his appointment - on his first day on the job.
Although we are told in the paragraph referred to above that Mathias
is a messenger at the "Independent Viewpoint", we do not yet know
what happened at the interview which Sagoe attended before he got his
job. So we are still waiting to have the details of how Mathias

made Sagoe wait for the interview in question (page 69). It is not until we get to page 72 that details of the interview scene begin to appear. This means that the incidents recorded on pages 68-72 (top of page 72) actually happen after those described on pages 72-82 have taken place.

In view of the foregoing, we may conclude that the state of flux in the fictional world depicted in The Interpreters helps to emphasise the atmosphere of uncertainty that pervades that world. As a result of this factor, the interpreters are disoriented, confused and frustrated. Their confusion and frustration are symbolically realised in the floods episode in which Egbo and Kola get lost briefly while on their way to Lazarus's Church to take "Noah" with them, and in which Egbo witnesses the prophet's failure to initiate "Noah" as an Apostle of his Church (pages 220-224). For instance, the description of the floods begins in this manner:

... The rain had begun early in the afternoon, washing out every landmark and submerging huts and the smaller market stalls. In settlements around the lagoon, the water rises quickly, blotting vegetation from sight and fouling raised stores of clean water, even on high shelves among the rafters.

(page 220)

The uncertainty of the two interpreters in question comes through very clearly in the episode concerned:

'We didn't pass through so much water, Kola. We cannot be anywhere near the place.'

'No, we are right so far.'

'Let's go back. I am not for this aquatic treasure hunt.'

'No, what we do is split... '

(page 221)

They are confused and uncertain because the familiar landmarks which they saw earlier that day have been washed away by the floods. This makes the area dangerous and, therefore, unsafe. Egbo and Kola therefore have to be very careful if they are not "to miss a foothold, to misjudge the ground and disappear forever in some hidden bog" (page 221). The episode in question thus becomes symbolic in the context of the major themes of The Interpreters in the sense that it highlights the heavy odds confronting the interpreters, and their confusion as well. But it also highlights the need for determination and perseverance even if the expected results are not forthcoming. Thus, Egbo finally sees the church, but he is immediately confronted by evidence of failure - Lazarus's failure to initiate "Noah" as one of his Apostles. "Noah's" failure to pass the test of the ordeal by fire prepared for him immediately dampens Egbo's feeling of satisfaction at finding the church at last. In a similar sort of way, the interpreters have to be able to cope with failures and frustration.

The interpreters' confusion has been brought about mainly by their inability to strike a balance between Cultures T and W. This factor has been realised in structural terms in the text in the following manner. As has been made clear above, there are in the novel spatiotemporal shifts to both Past A and Past B. These shifts are not, however, simply to the past as such. For within the flashbacks to the two aspects of the past, we are made to feel the passage of time. For instance, the story of the novel opens, in Chapter 1, in the present (pages 7-8) with a short description of the interpreters relaxing at the Club Cambana. Then follows a flashback, on page 8, to what we later recognise to be Past A when we see the interpreters visiting Osa, Egbo's creek home-town. But within this past, we move

still further back in time to Past B to see the child Egbo presented to his grandfather, the Egbo Onosa (pages 10-11). We then return to the present of Past A to witness the interpreters continuing their journey by canoe. The resumed description of that journey goes on till page 14, where we return to the current events of the fictional present, at which point we are reminded that the interpreters are still at the Club Cambana in Lagos. On page 16, however, we again revert to Past B to read about the death of Egbo's parents by drowning and his own mysterious escape from the same fate. Within the paragraph in which that incident is recorded, however, we move forward by some years, still within Past B, to learn of the bad treatment meted out to Egbo by his first two guardians - a) the school teacher, who "wore out canes on him" and b) his aunt's trading partner at Oshogbo for whom he refused to mind the shops (pages 16-17). Then we move forward still to learn of Egbo's refusal, when he is already in college, to prostrate while greeting the merchant (his guardian's husband) on his return home on holiday (page 17). After this, we return again to the present of the fictional present, that is, to the Club Cambana scene, at the bottom of page 17.

On page 26, however, we are again returned to the past, this time to Past A (from the point of view of Bandele, Kola and Egbo, who have all returned from abroad by this time) to see Sheikh returning home in a ship. Then suddenly on page 27, we find ourselves in the future, but the future within Past A and not from the point of view of the fictional present, to see Sheikh already working as a Civil Servant. The narration continues to move forward rapidly till page 31 when Sheikh's madness - which has been made inevitable - is

touched upon.

The result of all this is that events in the past are made to complement those in the present and vice versa , in such a way that we cannot think in terms of the one without the other.¹³ So, although there is discontinuity in the flow of the narration in The Interpreters as a result of the use of this juxtapositional device, what stands out prominently in the reader's mind is the way in which the past and the present (and the future) have been made to overlap in the novel. Thus, events in the present - whether the present within the fictional present or the present within the past - are to be seen and interpreted in terms of events that have happened in the past. The thematic implication of this is that the frustration of the interpreters has been largely brought about by their inability to resist the impositions made on them by the past, or the dead ("Is it so impossible to seal off the past and let it alone? ..." - page 121).

This is an issue over which Egbo constantly agonises in the text: the past, for him , "' should be dead'" (page 120). He uses the terms "the past" and "the dead" as synonyms to refer to tradition and "the living" as a synonym for "the present". In view of the fact that tradition continues to make impositions on the individual in the modern society, therefore, it is of the "tyrannous energies" of the traditional culture (page 12) that Egbo is most aware .

Similarly, Kola, too, is very much aware of this strong influence of tradition on their lives. He speculates at one point in the text

¹³ From this point of view, The Interpreters is not unlike Muriel Spark's The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1978 impression), although the dislocation of normal time sequence in it does not have such a disruptive effect on its structure - as it does in the case of The Interpreters. But modest as that temporal dislocation is in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, it does make its point.

on how wonderful it would be for him and his friends to be, figuratively speaking, motherless children and "owe neither the dead nor the living nothing of our selves..." (pages 244-245).

I shall at this point cite two examples, from the text, of the way in which tradition brings pressure to bear on the individual in the more modern social setting in the novel. One such example is that of the way in which Dehinwa's mother and, indeed her family at large, try to influence her choice of her future husband: "...I haven't worked and slaved to send you to England and pulled strings to get you a really good post nearly in the Senior Service only to have you give me a Hausa grandson" (pages 37-38). There is also a suggestion of tribalism here: Dehinwa, being a Yoruba is not supposed to marry a non-Yoruba, let alone "a Northerner" (page 37). In addition, Dehinwa is supposed to uphold the traditional code of behaviour relating to the issue of sex before marriage ("...If I found a man in your house at any awkward hour I will let him know that my family bears the name of Komolola. A man in this house at night?...." (page 38).

But Dehinwa's mother need not have worried about this aspect of Dehinwa's life, for she shows that she can handle the situation. For instance, she refuses to sleep with Sagoe, until towards the end of the novel, in spite of the latter's impatience: he complains of her making him hold his groin in pain (page 105), and of refusing to give him that which he desires ("...You hold me off with hoping - why?" - page 33). Here is a girl who has been educated abroad, and who can sleep in the same flat with a man (albeit reluctantly) still trying to be faithful to the traditional ban on sex before marriage. The fact that Dehinwa could on one occasion refuse to use wigs "like all fashionable women" (page 7) - the wearing of wigs is a Western

concept - , and would on another want to keep to tradition shows that the transition from Culture T to Culture W is an on-going process in the mind of the thinking individual. It is also indicative of the fact that it is in the individual consciousness that the factor of cultural tension is most visibly manifested in the text.

Furthermore, the fact that it is Dehinwa's family which imposes so much on her suggests that the family remains an important institution through which tradition brings pressure to bear on the individual. This line of interpretation is reinforced by Bandele's pointing out to Sagoe the futility of his trying to cut off his family ties ("Bandele shook his head, 'That is not so easy'" - page 90), in spite of the fact that sustaining such a link has its unpleasant aspects - as Dehinwa finds out, and as Sagoe himself finds out when a "family delegation, a clever assortment of eleventh cousins who he could not know" visit him to ask him to be cautious about what he writes in his column in the "Independent Viewpoint"(page 107).

The second example is provided by the sustained manner in which Egbo's grandfather and the Osa Descendants Union pester him to become the next Egbo Onosa, that is, traditional ruler of Osa. Egbo's instinct is to decline the post but he finds that it is not easy to reject it out of hand. The point now is not that delegations from the Osa Descendants Union "plague him daily" (page 12) but that they pester him so much because he is, traditionally, in the line to succession to the throne because his late mother was the Princess of Egbo, who was, presumably, the eldest daughter of the reigning Egbo Onosa, Egbo's grandfather. From this point of view, it is possible

that the name "Egbo" has been given to the character in question to stress his connection with the traditional royal family of Osa.

The fact that forms of Culture T still persist to make their presence felt in the society depicted in The Interpreters is also expressed in symbolic terms in the novel. In an early passage in the text (pages 20-21) the struggles of an apala band for survival in the face of a new type of music developed as a result of the coming into the hitherto exclusively traditional Culture T - high-life music - is highlighted.¹⁴ The desperate situation which the apala group are in and their resourcefulness are emphasised. For instance, they are portrayed as carrying the fight to the high-life band. Normally, they play in the streets, but later they grew bolder: "...First their tunes, then their instruments - the talking-drum especially - invaded the night-clubs...." (page 21). The apala band, and, indeed all apala bands in general are tenacious and resilient and it is these qualities that make them emerge the stronger forces over the high-life bands.

One implication of the foregoing is that there is no time at which the modern Western Culture (Culture W) ceases to act on the former traditional Nigerian Culture (Culture T), which is not only always resisting the attempt to do away with it but also carrying the fight to the "enemy". So, elements of both Cultures are very much present in the society of the novel, although the relationship between them is an uneasy one. Another example which shows the

¹⁴ Apala is "a kind of Yoruba music". (See "Glossary" in The Interpreters , p. 259). Furthermore, high-life is a kind of music indigenous to West Africa.

effect of the impact of Culture W on Culture T is the semi-comic instance of Sagoe's mother's post - Missionary Christian faith in laxative medicines as a way to achieving "spiritual" purity via physical purgation. Although this example belongs to Past B, it derives from earlier Western influence through Victorian concepts of mens sana in corpore sano ("a healthy mind in a healthy body") plus muscular Christianity.

The interpreters know that in order to balance elements of Culture T and Culture W against one another, they have to critically examine their experiences, that is, events which they witness and/or participate in, in the hope of capturing the essence of those experiences. From this point of view, Lazarus's claim of having risen from the dead is a reflection of the interpreters' attempts to capture the essence of their experiences.

2.4 THE LAZARUS STORY

It is during Sagoe's trip to Ikoyi cemetery to attend the funeral of Sir Derinola, the late Chairman of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint" and, therefore, his employer, that he and Lazarus see each other for the first time (pages 111-113). They do not however talk to each other on this occasion. They next meet two weeks later while they are both watching the pursuit of "Barabbas" the young thief by the Oyingbo mob (page 118) from the balcony of the Hotel Excelsior, in which Sagoe first lived for some time after his arrival back in Nigeria from Europe and America. They meet again about six or seven weeks after this latter meeting - this time at the Club Cambana a fortnight after the burial of Sheikh (page 162). Sheikh's

death in fact, performs for the interpreters, as well as for Dehinwa and Lasunwon, the function of foreshadowing the revelation of Lazarus's claimed experience of resurrection. The fact that Sagoe and Lazarus meet again six or seven weeks after their second meeting implies that the story of The Interpreters began in the present only about nine weeks previously at most. It is at this third meeting that the prophet invites the four remaining interpreters (Sheikh having died recently) and Lasunwon and Dehinwa to attend the morning service in his church the following Sunday (page 161), an invitation which Sagoe accepts on his friends' behalf. They duly honour that invitation seven days later (pages 164-182).

In the episode recorded in those pages, Lazarus tells Sagoe and his friends (as well as his regular congregation, of course) in great detail about his experience of having risen from the dead. He has given the interpreters the newspaper story of that event at their meeting at the Club Cambana. In his own account of it, he has stressed the fact that he was black when he died but that he had already become an albino by the time he rose from the dead (pages 160-161). In the church scene, however, he goes beneath the surface of that experience in an attempt to place it firmly within the framework of the supernatural. Egbo and Kola see Lazarus later on the same day when they go back to the church to take "Noah" (formerly "Barabbas") with them (pages 220-224). Here, they see Lazarus fail to initiate "Noah" as an Apostle of his church (pages 222-224).

Lazarus continues to interact with the four interpreters till the end of the novel. For instance, he sits for Kola who paints him in the Pantheon of the gods as Esumare, or the link between heaven and

earth (pages 227 ff.). This happens during the last forty-eight hours of the fictional present.

It can thus be seen that the Lazarus story runs right through The Interpreters. We see him on the very first day of the present (pages 111-113), and we continue to see him at various intervals throughout the period covered by that present. The Lazarus story thus constitutes the most visible link between the various events which take place in the narrative present. One interesting point that emerges from this observation is that it seems to reflect the fact that Lazarus is destined to become a link in the Pantheon. For this reason, it is very important indeed; and the other events in the present are therefore to be seen from the perspective which it offers to the reader. This perspective has to do with experience.

The point about the Lazarus story, then, is that it tells of a unique experience; it is not every day that one meets someone who so stubbornly believes (as Lazarus does) that he has once died and risen from the dead. It is thus the unique nature of Lazarus's experience that makes the four interpreters go to his church to hear details of that experience. They would, in particular, like to extract from the prophet's story the essence of his experience. This is the main reason why they have decided to attend the morning service referred to above. For instance, after Lazarus has finished talking of his experience of death at the Club Cambana, Egbo's eyes "...gleamed with morbid intensity, seeking like the rest to extract from his face the essence of the man's experience" (page 161). It is this essence of experience that the interpreters are trying to capture in the novel, and which Lazarus, too, is trying to get hold of by establishing his

church. This factor makes him stand out prominently in the text so that he becomes a very important character from the point of view of the major themes of The Interpreters, and of the interpreters themselves. They want to get closer to Lazarus so as to see what they could learn from his experience, which they find intriguing even if difficult to believe.

More important, however, the interpreters are attracted to Lazarus and his church because he symbolises for them the dilemma which they are battling with in the novel: their cultural ambiguity. For instance, his albinoism constitutes the physical manifestation of his experience of death and resurrection; and it is the oddity of his skin colour that first impresses itself on Kola (pages 157-158), as well as on Sagoe, who at first mistakes him for a white man (page 111) but realises his mistake very quickly (page 113), who appears to pretend not to recognise Lazarus at their second meeting (page 116) and reacts with deep uneasiness at his albinoism (page 119). Similarly, it is Lazarus's albinoism that makes Dehinwa cast apprehensive glances at him when she sees him for the first time (page 157) and shrink as the prophet "took the chair next to her" (page 159). Also, the Oyingbomob do not hide their contempt for Lazarus as an albino when he rescues "Barabbaš" from them: "...Were they short of firewood at home? Your mother forgot to bake you properly..." (pages 117-118). It is also in terms of the metaphor of cooking that Kola, the artist, conceives of Lazarus's albinoism: "...that man [meaning Lazarus] looked like yellow bark soaked eternally in agbo ["a potion of bark and roots" - page 259] and boiled tough and arid." (page 158). In addition, the paleness of the prophet's skin colour does not lose itself on Sagoe ("It [Lazarus's neck] dived forwards

and settled fitfully above the back rest, flitting as he spoke, a pale bat in the corner gloom " (page 119), and on the Oyingbo mob ("Father of bats"-page 117).

The implication of Lazarus's claim that he was black before he suddenly dropped dead in an obscure village six years previously (in Part B) but that he had turned into an albino by the time he was let out of the coffin in which he was to have been buried is that he is, strictly speaking, no longer a human being. At the same time, however, he is not a supernatural being either. He is also neither black nor white but something even more odd than Joe Golder, who is a quadroon. So, he is both spiritually and culturally ambiguous. In this respect, he is a symbolic figure in whom the interpreters see their dilemma sharply accentuated.

One effect of the foregoing is that Lazarus is a fusion of elements of the human and of the supernatural. And it is probably for this reason that Kola paints him as Esumare, or the link between heaven and earth, in his Pantheon of Yoruba gods. For the prophet's experience is the most unique in the novel. From this point of view, the various bridges referred to in the text acquire symbolic significance in the novel. In physical terms, a good number of bridges are referred to in the text because there are several references to water in it. But since they are used as one type of link or the other, they acquire a symbolic value in the novel. Kola, for instance, uses the bridge motif in the Pantheon to symbolise the link between heaven and earth and, therefore, between the supernatural and the human. In addition, bridges also constitute an important part of Sheikh's "Domes philosophy": "...the b-b-bridge is the d-d-dome of religion and b-b-bridges d-d-don't j-j-just g-g-go from h-h-here to

ththere; a bridge also faces backwards'" (page 9).

It is not only in Lazarus, however, that the factor of fusion is represented. For some of the main characters depicted in the novel are fusions of one thing and another. For instance, the interpreters are fusions of elements of the traditional African culture (Culture T) and the Western Culture (Culture W). Furthermore, Peter Wall and Joe Golder also embody fusions of one type or the other. For instance, Peter believes that he is German, American and Nigerian all at the same time (pages 136 and 137 of text). Also, Joe Golder is portrayed as a fusion of black and white blood since he is, by his own admission "three-quarters white" (page 101). In view of all this, we may say that there is a melting-pot motif throughout The Interpreters.

The melting-pot motif in the novel is, however, related to the uneasy relationship that exists between Culture T and Culture W, with its implications for the racial issue of the relationship between black people and white people. For instance, the fact that elements of Cultures T and W are fused in the interpreters themselves is responsible for the tension that is so clearly reflected in their lives. Similarly, the fusion of white and black in blood in Golder leads to racial tension in him. So, the society depicted in The Interpreters is one in which ambiguities thrive, the effect being that certainty becomes annoyingly and depressingly evasive. Egbo's frequent bouts of anger and depression in the novel are therefore understandable.

The point being made here is that Lazarus's experience of death and resurrection is not only unique in itself but that it is also symbolic of the experiences of the interpreters. For the main factor in their experience of life is their experience of the effects

of the coming together of Cultures T and W. The Lazarus story thus constitutes the focus of the story told, in the present, in The Interpreters.

The significance of the Lazarus story is further enhanced by the fact that the story of his resurrection is told in Part Two of the text. Now, Part Two of The Interpreters has a sombre tone to it while it is in Part One that we have the most hilarious episodes in the novel - for example, the interview scene (pages 72-82) and the Oguazor party scene (pages 139-152). In addition, there are also to be found in Part One numerous examples of Sagoe's jokes, Egbo's irreverence, and so on. The sombre tone of much of Part Two is thus a deviation from the light-hearted tone that so liberally characterises Part One. This change is signalled by the description of Sheikh's death (page 155). This death casts a heavy shadow over the interpreters in Part Two. It drives home to them the hopelessness of their situation and thus makes them become more serious. What has happened to Sheikh could happen to any one of them at any time; and here they are still not sure about anything. Furthermore, the Sheikh's death is a cruel blow. That he who had suffered so much in life should die in such a senseless way is a tragedy indeed, and the remaining interpreters never recover properly from it. They still try a few jokes, and there are funny incidents recorded in Part Two; but there is none of them that makes the reader laugh as heartily as he has done in Part One. For instance, although Sagoe can still joke in Lazarus's church ("Are you thrilled, dear?" - page 175), and although the way in which the congregation dance at the service in question is likened to a "Witches' Sabbath" by the implied author functioning as narrator (page 174), one's impression of the comedy

is one of low-key humour. For we know by now that the interpreters, as well as Dehinwa (but not Lasunwon), are in the church for a serious reason.

The reason for the more serious tone of the narrative in Part Two is that it is in this part of the novel that the four remaining interpreters begin to settle down to the serious business of clarifying their responses to what is going on around them. In Part One, we see them encountering different types of people, witnessing events and participating in some themselves - in the present, in Past A and, in the case of Egbo and Sagoe in Past B as well. The result of all this activity is that they acquire a lot of experience not only in their society but also abroad - in Europe and the United States. But the largely comical nature of the narrative in Part One tends to obscure the seriousness of the issues involved in the text. In other words, the atmosphere created in Part One does not strike one as being as serious as that created in Part Two. The reason for this state of affairs is that all the satirised characters in the novel - such as Chief Winsala, Sir Derinola, the Managing Director, Professor and Mrs Oguazor, Ayo Faseyi and so on are introduced in Part One. And since the most hilarious episodes in the text - for example, the Embassy reception (pages 39-47), the Interview scene (pages 72-82) and the Oguazor party scene (pages 139-152) - contain descriptions of their activities, it is those descriptions which impress themselves on the reader. Furthermore, although attention is also focussed on the interpreters in Part One, especially in the first thirty-three pages of the novel (pages 7-39), many of their own activities, too, are presented in a comic fashion. A good example of this factor is provided in the scene in which Sagoe relentlessly teases Dehinwa in the latter's

flat (pages 61-67, and 104-107) about her continued refusal to sleep with him.

It is thus not until we get to Part Two of the novel that we begin to see the frustration of the interpreters in clear terms. Their friendly quarrels and arguments begin to take on a more serious nature in the second Part, especially towards the end of the novel. For example, they quarrel in Part One over Kola's drawing of Owolebi (pages 22-26), but it is all in good humour. By the time we come to Part Two however, the interpreters have started quarrelling over fundamental issues - such as death: Kola insults Lasunwon for saying rude things about the dead Sheikh (pages 162-164). The final disagreement occurs between Bandele and Egbo over the issue of Egbo's relationship with the girl student (pages 241 ff.). This disagreement marks a turning point in the relationship of the four remaining interpreters; it will never be the same again ("Kola held her [Monica's] hand, admitting, it is a night of severance, every man is going his way" - page 245). At the end of the novel, we see the interpreters standing apart from one another, the suggestion being that a major change is bound to take place in their relationship with each other and in their lives.

It is in the serious setting of Part Two of The Interpreters, then, that the major part of the Lazarus story is told. From this point of view, the description of the manner in which Sheikh died not only sets the mood for the rest of Part Two; it also in a way foreshadows the description of Lazarus's experience of death. Similarly the death and burial of Brother Ezra (pages 111 and 112) also serve to foreshadow the revelation of the prophet's experience of death. There is a

contrast involved in the description of Sheikh's death and Lazarus's experience of death: Sheikh is dead and his friends do not expect to see him anymore. In a different class, however, is Lazarus, who claims to have died and risen from the dead, thus turning death into a physical experience of the supernatural. This, as has been stated before, is what appeals to the interpreters. And it is because it is so thematically significant in the novel that the Lazarus story runs through the text. The main events of the fictional present are interspersed within it. For instance, accounts of the meetings of the interpreters in Bandele's house in Ibadan (pages 119-122); of Egbo's relationship with the girl student (for example, pages 126-134) and his guilt arising from that relationship; of Sagoe's meeting with Peter Wall and the Oguazor party scene (pages 135-152); also Sagoe's meeting with Joe Golder (pages 183-201); Sheikh's death and its effect on the remaining interpreters (pages 157ff.); Kola's growing affection for Monica Faseyi (pages 201-214 and 226 ff.); and of "Noah's" death and Golder's guilt (pages 234 and 247) are incorporated into the Lazarus story.

2.5 CONCLUSION

What emerges from the structural eccentricities manifested in The Interpreters, then, is the general state of disorder of the fictional world portrayed in it. There is chaos and, therefore, uncertainty in that world. As a result, the interpreters are confused and frustrated. Playing a major role in bringing about the general state of disorder in the society of the novel is the factor of fusion, which is directly related to the cultural, and other types of, ambiguity that are rife in that society. At the same time,

however, it is necessary for the interpreters to achieve a fusion or synthesis of some sort if they are going to balance elements of both Culture T and Culture W against one another and gain a sense of certainty. It is how to gain that sense of meaningful fusion of elements of both Cultures that is the basic cause of their confusion.

In view of the foregoing, we may conclude that the factor of temporal dislocation has been deliberately foregrounded in The Interpreters. I would therefore claim that it constitutes the dominant structure around which other thematically significant textual patterns in the text revolve. The validity of this claim is established in Chapters 3-6 below.

CHAPTER 3

THE LINGUISTIC AND STYLISTIC REALISATION OF THE FUTILITY OF THE SOCIETY DEPICTED IN THE INTERPRETERS

3.1 GENERAL

The interpreters' attempts to bring about a meaningful fusion of elements of Culture T and Culture W as a way of gaining a sense of direction in their lives are discussed in The Interpreters side by side with the depiction of the futile existence of the people portrayed in the society of the novel at large. The lives of those people are a waste in the sense that they have a corrupted view of reality, from the point of view that they have taken ambiguity (which is the reality in the social setting of the text) for certainty by pretending that they have discovered the secret of how to lead a happy life. There are two groups of characters foregrounded in the text in this connection: a) the members of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint" and, to a lesser extent, those of the Board of Sheikh's Ministry, a good number of whom are failed politicians - as we shall see in the next chapter; and b) the intellectuals at the university college in Ibadan, especially Professor Oguazor.

Because they have taken ambiguity for certainty, these two groups of characters are heavily satirised in the text. The satire on them helps to show the type of lives the interpreters would have been leading had they not been striving to gain an understanding of the deeper meaning of life. This is the reason why they reject that type of existence.

In view of the foregoing, Soyinka's negative attitude to the

said Board members and intellectuals, and his much more positive attitude to the interpreters constitute the value picture of The Interpreters. Now, since "... our value picture of a fiction depends considerably on the light in which characters and events are presented to us." (Leech and Short, 1981: 275), it is this value picture of The Interpreters that enables the reader to achieve an identity of viewpoint with Soyinka in the text, and which therefore makes it possible for him to interpret the novel in an appropriate way. It is the filth motif that provides the basis for our conceptualisation of this value picture of The Interpreters.

3.2 THE STYLISTIC EXPONENTS OF THE FILTH MOTIF

The crucial issue here is the symbolic use of setting in the text. There are two crucial factors involved here: a) the use, in the novel, of Lagos, Ibadan and Osa as psychological setting; and b) the thematic function of the different types of water occurring in the text.

3.2.1 Lagos, Ibadan and Osa as Psychological Setting

The story told in The Interpreters is acted out mainly in Lagos and Ibadan, which are two major cities in modern Nigeria. They were, at the time the novel was written (in the early 1960's - it was first published in 1965), separated by a distance of about a hundred miles.¹ This information is, in fact, given in the novel in a statement by Bandele in which he complains about going back to Lagos the following weekend to attend the service in Lazarus's Church, to which

¹Since that time, an expressway has been built to link the two cities, with the result that the distance between them has been shortened considerably.

the prophet has just invited the four friends, as well as Dehinwa and Lasunwon: "Bandelegroaned. 'You mean another hundred mile drive down next week?'" (page 162).

This statement reinforces the observation made in Chapter 2 that the interpreters move between Lagos and Ibadan and vice versa.

The fact that the friends move about in the society of the novel gives the impression that the physical setting of the text is fractured (Cf. Obichina, 1975: 152). But this fracturing of the setting is only to be seen on the horizontal axis of narrative structure. For, in terms of the satire in the novel, Lagos and Ibadan are no longer seen as separate cities but as two related aspects of the same thing - the futility of the present (page 121 of text). Thus, although Chief Winsala, Sir Derinola, and the Managing Director (all members of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint") and the Chairman of the Board of Sheikh's Ministry live and work in Lagos; and although Professor J.D. Oguazor and his wife Caroline, as well as Ayo Faseyi and Dr. Lumoye (who refuses to abort the girl student's pregnancy) live and work in Ibadan, they all constitute variations on the same theme: the unacceptable face of modernity. It is for this reason that it is only one aspect of life in Ibadan - university college life - that we are made to see in the novel. In this respect, although Egbo and Simi (who first came together in Past B) continue to meet in Ibadan in the narrative present, those meetings usually take place in Bandele's house on the campus (pages 122 and 218). The only time that we see Egbo in Simi's room in the present is towards the end of the novel (Chapter 17) when Bandele goes to the relevant house in town to seek Egbo's help in dealing with the aftermath of Golder's unintentionally causing "Noah's" death (pages 234

-235). Bandele then drives Egbo to Kola's studio (back on campus), where Egbo learns for the first time that Golder is a homosexual (page 236). His reaction to the news is one of revulsion and shock and he refuses to ride back to town in Bandele's car with Golder still in it, preferring instead to "walk the four miles to town and Simi's house " (page 238).

In view of the foregoing, then, it is the link that exists between Lagos and Ibadan that is emphasised in The Interpreters and not the fact that they are two separate cities. This factor is reinforced by our realisation that the university college campus in Ibadan, like the Club Cambana in Lagos, also serves the purpose of bringing the interpreters together despite the fact that it on one level keeps them physically apart.

Thus, from the point of view of the satire in The Interpreters, Lagos and Ibadan are to be seen largely in terms of psychological setting. For they are used primarily to make explicit what the various sub-groups satirised have in common: the development of the various professional and other interest groups - which have arisen as a result of the transition from Culture T to Culture W - into fiercely possessive and exclusive social cults to suit their own selfish dispositions. The two cities in question have been used in this way because they have developed as a direct result of the transition from the traditional African Culture to the exotic Western Culture. Similarly, Osa is also to be seen largely in terms of psychological setting. In a way Osa, too, constitutes part of the physical setting of The Interpreters - since the interpreters visit it at least once during Past A. At the same time, however, it continues to haunt Egbo's consciousness for most of the story, thus

functioning largely as psychological setting. For instance, it assumes greater symbolic significance for Egbo as the story progresses: he associates it in his mind with tradition and, therefore, with the past and the old.

So, on the level of the first layer of symbolisation Lagos and Ibadan, as well as Osa, are used to describe the physical setting of The Interpreters. It is, however, in the second layer of symbolisation that the value picture of the novel is located, for it is at this level that the author tries to get the reader to achieve a rapport with him.

The symbolic use of setting in The Interpreters then, is meant to highlight the phony morality by which the satirised characters conduct their lives. Their only concern in life is how to achieve and sustain by whatever method or methods, positions of eminence, influence and power in their society. Wealth, and not academic achievements as such is the important prerequisite for securing these positions. Thus, everyone's ambition is to move up into a higher, more prestigious social class and stay there. This point is made very clearly and loudly by Ayo Faseyi, who is the best example of the way people struggle to become socially acceptable and influential, and who worries himself to the point of insanity each time his wife deviates from what he and the society consider proper social behaviour. For instance, the day following the Oguazor party, he decides - urged on by the mischievous Kola - to go to Oguazor and apologise for his wife's behaviour at the Professor's residence:

'...I will have to go and apologise. Not that it can repair the damage. Do you know a Minister was present. Yes, and one or two other VIPs. Oguazor knows people, you

know. I saw four corporation chairmen there, and some Permanent Secretaries. A thing like that, Kola, one is simply socially finished.'

(page 202)

This statement of Ayo's gives us a clue as to the nature of the stratification of the society depicted in The Interpreters. At the top of the social ladder seem to be the politicians ("Do you know a Minister was present. "). Then there are other VIPs (Very Important Personalities), many of whom are probably big businessmen. Then come corporation chairmen, Permanent Secretaries and so on. We also know that the politicians occupy powerful social positions from evidence supplied by other parts of the text. For instance, since they are in control of political power, other groups in the society look up to them as godfathers to shower favours on them. This they do accordingly by distributing appointments to Boards, and so on, to favoured followers and relations - for example, Chief Winsala and the other members of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint" (page 77).

Nepotism and corruption are therefore practised on a large scale in the society of the novel. What matters is not what one knows but who one knows. To trust in one's own intellectual capabilities is thus disadvantageous, as Sagoe discovers at the interview he attends for his job at the "Independent Viewpoint", where he is insulted by the Managing Director for daring to imply a criticism of the methods of the Board of Interview (pages 78-79). He later gets the job of features writer, not because he has been found by the Board to be professionally qualified for it (there has been no interview in the real sense of the word) but as a reward for having

extricated the Chairman of the Board, Sir Derinola, and his lackey Chief Winsala from a nasty jam at the Hotel Excelsior (pages 92-93). Similarly, Sheikh, too, discovers to his grief and at the cost of insanity that intellectual capability is not enough in his society to make him socially acceptable.

In view of the foregoing, the factor of class is very crucial in the fictional world depicted in The Interpreters. It is, for instance, the ambition of people in that society to worm their way into a better class that rules their lives. Whether they are already in good social standing - such as Ayo Faseyi and Professor Oguazor -, or they are still at the bottom of the social ladder - such as the Oyingbo mob (page 114) and the people in Sir derinola's funeral cortege, the expectation is the same: to get themselves established in a better social class. The people in Sir Derinola's funeral cortege never stop gazing at the cars, hoping that their own funeral will approximate to the "glory" and splendour of that of the late Chairman (page 112). All that is important is to become influential in the society and flaunt the fact of that influence, and power.

Getting oneself ensconced in the prize classes, is, however, not enough. One must get oneself entrenched in that position and defend it against any form of threat. Every class therefore uses the weapon that is most readily available to it to defend itself: numerical strength. Thus, the class to which Professor and Mrs Oguazor belong quickly uses this weapon against Monica Faseyi at the party at the Oguazor residence when she rebels against the Victorian morality by which that class strives to protect itself from the likes of the

young but tough English girl (pages 143-145). She is isolated but unbowed, thus leaving the worry to her petty-minded husband. Similarly, in the interview episode Sagoe is antagonised by the Managing Director who sees him as a threat to the established order ("...We want the kind of person who is going to respect his superior not conceited boys of your type...."- page 79). And Sheikh, too, is sent to Coventry, as it were, by the Board of his Ministry and Parliament because he is seen as endangering the security of the position of the members of that Board - especially the financial security of its Chairman ("Why do we employ these too-knows?" - page 27). In view of the foregoing, therefore, it is not surprising that corruption is rife in the society depicted in the fictional world portrayed in The Interpreters. It is this type of society that the interpreters have to deal with in their attempt to achieve a meaningful fusion of elements of Culture W and Culture T.

Because the society of the novel is characterised by futility, the standards of morality which constitute the norm in that society are hollow and, therefore, unacceptable. The satirised characters, for instance, believe that they are leading satisfying lives, whereas what they have done in reality is take the phoney for the real, the hollow for the substantial. They feel that they have successfully achieved a meaningful fusion of elements of Cultures T and W by embracing aspects of both Cultures that they feel are advantageous to themselves - such as the enshrined respect for age in Culture T (pages 79 and 147) and the advantage of speaking the English language, and of literacy, which Culture W confers on one. The satire in the text thus consists mainly in exposing the phoniness of their situation.

This exposure is manifested through Soyinka's symbolic use of various locations in the Lagos landscape. The major distinguishing feature of this landscape is the lagoon, which is for the most part polluted as well as being itself a source of pollution. It is this link between the lagoon and filth that points directly to the underlying themes of The Interpreters. But since the lagoon itself is in the text only one type of water referred to, it is necessary first to place the references to it in the context of references to other types of water before discussing the specific role it plays in the novel.

3.2.2 Types of Water Occuring in The Interpreters

There are nine main types of water referred to in The Interpreters: creek water, rain water, puddles, streams, greasy water, canal water, lagoon water, the sea and the River Ogun. They are grouped below according to the relationships that exist among them.

3.2.2.1 Creek Water

Water here represents in one sense death for Egbo, for it is in the creek at or around Osa that his parents drowned and where he himself narrowly escaped death in the same accident (pages 8-14). So, the picture which we have of water in this respect is one of wickedness: it is seen by Egbo in terms of "nymphomaniac depths" (page 14). It is therefore related to Simi and Egbo's final fate of "drowning" (page 251). In another sense, however, creek water is also linked, albeit indirectly, to traditional religious worship. It is partly for this reason that Simi is portrayed as "Mammy - Watta", or a mermaid, who is worshipped in the traditional setting ("...She has the eyes of a fish, Egbo murmured, and the boys said,

Oh, the creek man has found his Mammy Watta" - page 52).

3.2.2.2 Rain Water

(a) It forms puddles and pools (pages 7-8,15,23,32 and 107).

(b) It gives rise to floods (pages 107 and 220).

In these instances, rain water contributes to the filth and confusion that so strikingly characterise The Interpreters. But since most of the action in the present takes place in the wet season, there are several other references to rain in the text - for example, on pages 16,17,21,41,104,107,108 and 155 .

(c) The rains are also a contributory cause of Sheikh's death: he dies while trying to prevent his car from crashing into a stationery lorry (page 155), which has been abandoned presumably after it has broken down either during a downpour or as a direct result of the rains. This observation is consistent with the fact that the rains as well as the bad condition of the roads in the society of the novel, which are full of pot-holes (pages 34 and 162), very often cause cars and other vehicles to break down (Sagoe is said to crow over stalled cars at least twice in the novel - pages 15 and 107).

3.2.2.3 Puddles

These are the polluting effects of rain water (pages 7-8,15,23, 32 and 107) and of floods (pages 107 and 221). On pages 7-8, for instance, rain water first pollutes Egbo's beer (page 7) and Egbo's polluted beer in turn then pollutes the rising pool created by the rain. Also, puddles are found on roads in Lagos because those roads are characterised by pot-holes (see pages 15,34 and 107. This factor causes cars to break down frequently whenever it rains (pages 15 and 107). Finally, Sagoe thinks, in figurative terms, of the puddle

denoted on page 107 as a "brown lake".

3.2.2.4 The Stream

- (a) There is a stream mentioned in connection with Oshun grove (pages 8-9 and 17). Water here, again for Egbo, is a source of hope - he hopes that his dead parents would one day rise from the stream, since they died by drowning (pages 8-9 and 17). But the water of the stream also serves for him as "teacher": after some time he begins to yearn for depth and hopes to find it in the stream. (page 9)
- (b) There is also a reference to "a mere finger of water" on page 223, and this could be taken to be a small stream of water formed as a result of the heavy rain and the floods described in this section of the text.

3.2.2.5 Greasy Water

This type of water is to be found in the sink in the canteen in the "Independent Viewpoint" building. It helps to pollute the canal referred to below and contributes to the "special quality of the smell in the canteen itself (page 73).

3.2.2.6 Canal Water

Water here is associated with filth and excrement and is to be found behind the "Independent Viewpoint" building (pages 72-73). Furthermore, the "semi-canals" referred to on page 220 are similarly associated with filth (it is the lagoon that is responsible for the formation of these semi-canals; "sluggish semi-canals of lagoon seepage").

3.2.2.7 Lagoon Water

- (a) It is polluted by water from the canal referred to above - which in turn has been polluted from the canteen mentioned above - at a point behind the "Independent Viewpoint" building (pages 72-73). But it is not only the polluted water of the canal that pollutes it; human beings, too, do so (page 76).
- (b) It is located at different points in the novel. It flows under the Carter Bridge, which links the Lagos mainland and island, a bridge over which Sagoe has to walk on his way to Ikoyi cemetery to attend Sir Derinola's funeral (page 110). The lagoon is used here to expose another unpleasant aspect of the Lagos landscape: "The lagoon was a trough of shea-butter churning, and cockroach huts of ako stalks circled the water edge in uncertain nibbles."
- (c) The lagoon also flows past the Hotel Excelsior at Oyingbo on the Lagos mainland (pages 115-116). Water is conceived of here - at least from "Barabbas's" point of view - as an escape route.
- (d) It also flows past the church of Lazarus (pages 220-224). Lagoon water at this point pollutes (pages 220-222) and is a causer of floods and, therefore, confusion. It is also linked to the sea here - on page 223).

3.2.2.8 The Sea

- (a) There is a reference to the sea in the description of Sheikh's return journey to Nigeria - he travels by boat (pages 26-27).
- (b) Sagoe makes Dehinwa drive to the beach at about five o'clock in the morning, after they have left the Club Cambana (pages 32-33).

- (c) The sea also functions as a causer of floods and, therefore, as an agent of pollution and confusion (pages 220-224).
- (d) A reference to the sea also occurs in the short passage on page 222 describing Egbo's first glimpse of this great expanse of water.

3.2.2.9 The River Ogun

Egbo bathes in it after his night of terror and pleasure in Simi's bed (pages 125-127) and thereafter makes it his "retreat" because it symbolises for him the domain of the gods (page 126). Water here thus has for Egbo restorative and cleansing power. And it is to this same spot that he later takes the unnamed undergraduate, whom he deflowers there (pages 132-134) - washing the blood off for her with water from the river : a cleansing act.

The references to various types of water in The Interpreters are enhanced by the story told in the novel being set in the wet season. For instance, as was stated in the previous Chapter, the months of April/May - July/August indicate a possible bracket within which the "present" story of the novel is set. The clearest indication of this factor is contained in the very first sentence of Part Two of the text, part of which was quoted above and which is reproduced here for purposes of ease of reference: "The rains of May become in July slit arteries of the sacrificial bull...."(page 155).

We know from this brief extract that July is the wettest month of the wet season. The metaphor of "slit arteries of the sacrificial bull" is intended to show how heavy and persistent the rains become in July. The use of the present tense form become is meant to express an eternal truth: that it is typical for the rains to become heavy and

persistent in Western Nigeria every July². Although the statement above indicates what happens every year, however, it also expresses the passing of time in the fictional present of the text. For instance, when the present story of the novel begins, it is raining and Egbo is grumbling about the rain polluting his beer (pages 7-8). It continues to rain all the time the interpreters are at the Club Cambana, especially in the early hours of the relevant morning. Some hours later, when Sagoe is on his way to the funeral of Sir Derinola, it rains intermittently. It is for this reason that the journalist at one point during his trip stops a taxi - only to discover that he has left his wallet in Dehinwa's flat (pages 108-109). Also, as was stated in Chapter 2, Egbo must have met the anonymous girl student for the first and only time in May (or late April at the earliest), for she talks of starting her examinations the following month (probably June). And the story ends with Golder's Vacation Concert and the posthumous exhibition of Sheikh's art works. So, at the most, the narrative present of the novel must have spanned about four to five months.

This observation is reinforced by other evidence in the text, which points to the very short time covered by the narrative present. For instance, at least the first hundred and seven pages of the novel (pages 7-113) cover less than twenty-four hours of the narrative present. This pattern is repeated in many other parts of the text; and the result is that incidents in the present follow one another rapidly - in temporal terms, that is, Sagoe, for instance, meets Lazarus

²The expression of eternal truths is one of the functions performed by present tense forms in English. See, for instance, Leech (1971:8).

again only two weeks after his encounter with the boot-coffiners (page 116; see also pages 110-113). And when the journalist-together with the remaining three interpreters (Sheikh having by now been dead for over three weeks) - meets Lazarus again, in the second Club Cambana episode on pages 157-162, only seven weeks at the most have passed since their last meeting (page 162). This means that it is by now just about nine weeks after the story of the novel began. This meeting with Lazarus takes place during a weekend, and the interpreters attend the prophet's Church the following Sunday (pages 164-182).³ Furthermore, the incidents described on pages 220-224 happen only a few hours after this church scene. And we also know that Sagoe meets Joe Golder for the first time only a few days at the most after (or probably the same day as) the party at the Oguazor residence (pages 183-201). Also we are sure that the events narrated in Chapters 16-18 (pages 224-251) cover a period of about twenty-four hours only. For instance, in Chapter 16, Kola realises that he has made an error of judgement in thinking that "Noah" would have been suitable for the role of Esumare in the Pantheon (pages 227-228). And yet, he has to represent the link between heaven and earth, and the exhibition at which the Pantheon is to be displayed is so near - only hours away. Thus, Kola has to work far into the night in order to finish painting Lazarus as Esumare. As a result, when Bandele drives to his studio early the following morning - between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. (page 236), Kola is still working.

³ In view of what we know about how much time has passed between the funeral scene and Sagoe's second meeting with Lazarus, the latter's reference to the Sunday in question as being the "tenth day of the death" of one of his Apostles Brother Ezra, can only be meaningful within the context of the church's observance of ritual: "...this is the tenth day when we perform the outing of his [Brother Ezra's] death according to the traditions of our church" (p165).

Then in Chapter 18, we have the exhibition and Golder's recital.

It is not, in fact, only the "present" story of The Interpreters that is set in the wet season. For instance, it has rained for most of the last four days of Past A ("For four days the sun had remained hidden." - page 107). This statement of the author's is made in connection with the first day the novel opens in the present when Sagoe leaves Dehinwa's flat to attend the funeral of Sir Derinola at Ikoyi cemetery. So, four days refers to Past A and not the present. In addition, the Embassy reception; also in Past A, takes place in the wet season. Kola and Bandele discuss the rains at one point during that party:

'It's going to rain(1). Kola brushed off a drop on his arm(2).

'When did it ever stop?'(3).

'What has happened anyway?(4). The season used to be more precise(5). And four months at the most (6). Maybe five' (7).

'Bommmmmmbbs' (8). Bandele, with his deepest bass(9).

'Last week I felt suddenly starved for some flare of colours so I woke up early to see in the dawn (10). And it came, by God it came(11). A huge suspension of ewedu⁴' (12)

'Come on, let's get in from it.' (13)

(page 41)

The fact that Kola thinks of the rain in terms of the ewedu metaphor (sentence 12) underlines his major preoccupation in the novel - gathering material for and working on his Pantheon of the gods. Similarly, the first time he sees Usaye, the albino daughter of the Faseyis' cook, it is the colour of her skin that strikes him most forcefully and which also makes him decide to paint her as Obaluwaiye's handmaiden: her

⁴"A slimy Yoruba vegetable soup." ("Glossary in The Interpreters, p. 260).

"colour and features" achieve for him the "perfect image" he is seeking after (page 50). Lazarus's colour also intrigues him when he first meets him, as I have pointed out in Chapter 2 .

The Embassy reception could not, however, have been held in the same wet season as the "present" story of the novel is set. For, as has been shown, the latter seems to start at the very beginning of the wet season, when the rains set in - that is, April/May. The suggestion, therefore, is that the reception in question must have taken place in the previous wet season. For instance, at the time of the party, Kola is still in the early stages of his painting of the Pantheon of the gods. When Monica talks at the party of going to his studio to see the painting, he replies that "There is nothing to see, I've only started" and that the work "hasn't reached the stage where it means anything" (page 46). And we know that it has taken him fifteen months to finish work on the Pantheon (pages 227 and 228). Since work on it is already coming to an end when the story opens in the present, it means that Kola had done the bulk of the work in Past A. The implication of the foregoing is that Past A and the narrative present cover a period of less than two years.

Furthermore, we are told in the novel that Sagoe returned to Nigeria during a wet season (page 107). This would be the same wet season in which the Embassy reception takes place. Sheikh had returned three months previously (page 89), which means before the start of the wet season. So, only a few weeks would have passed between Sagoe's return and the party, since he is by that time already working as a journalist: he seeks in vain to have an "exclusive statement" from the Ambassador (page 41). Although the precise time of the return of Bandele, Kola and Egbo is not given in the text, it can be

reasonably concluded that it must have been a few months before Sheikh's return.

The fact that the story in the present and certain aspects of the story in Part A are set in the wet season, coupled with the various references to water in the text indicates that water is a foregrounded element in The Interpreters. It is therefore meant, presumably, to perform a thematic function in the novel.

3.2.3 The Thematic Function of Water

This thematic function is two-fold: a) water functions as an agent of confusion; and b) it is also presented as a contributory factor to the filth in the society of the novel. With respect to (a), it is mainly rain water and the sea that cause confusion in the text. For instance, the rain is the Initiator of the floods described in Chapter 16, pages 220-224. It washes out familiar landmarks and destroys houses and market stalls, thus causing panic and concern among the people concerned (page 220). It also causes the sea to overflow its shores, thereby adding to the confusion of Kola and Egbo. As a result of playing this role of causer of confusion in the text, rain water and the sea are on occasion animated and humanised in the novel to emphasise the potency of their action. For instance, Sagoe early on in the story deifies the rain as "Rain the Great Leveller" for having caused confusion among motorists, who have been forced to abandon their cars (page 107). Cars in the society depicted in The Interpreters are a status symbol, and they are therefore a symbol of power proudly used by the more privileged classes in the society. One does not simply have to have a car; one needs to have a prestigious-looking car. That is why Sir Derinola rides about in a long American car (page 86). In the episode in question,

however, the rain has forced motorists to behave like everybody else by making them walk.

Also, it is the rain that puts a stop to the hollow exhibitionism of the high-life band at the Club Cambana early in the novel, thus creating the opportunity, in the form of an interval or silence, for the apala band to take the stand (pages 20-21). The trumpet "stabbed the night in one last defiant note" and the saxophone "slunk out of light,"⁵ a wounded serpent diminishing in obscene hisses" (page 15) because rain water has got into them. So, the high-life band are frustrated as well.⁶ And we have already seen that the rains are also a contributory cause of Sheikh's death.

In addition to functioning as an agent of confusion in The Interpreters, water also helps to foul up the atmosphere of the society of the novel. This is the second point mentioned above as (b). As has been shown in the classification of different types of water depicted in the text, water is in part associated with pollution.⁷ In the opening episode of the novel, Egbo's beer is polluted by rain water (page 7); his already polluted beer then foams over to pollute, in turn, the rising pool of water at his feet, which eventually reminds him of the trip to Osa which is described in the flashback to Past A on pages 8-14. Also, the lagoon, which has been polluted by the canal water behind the "Independent Viewpoint"⁸ The word light seems to suggest the lit stand or platform on which the high-life band and later the apala band presumably play.

⁵The way in which the rain, and the sea cause confusion in the text is elaborated in Chapter 6.

⁷That classification also shows that water is associated with other things, other issues in The Interpreters - for example, traditional sacred worship.

building itself later helps to pollute the area near Lazarus's Church in the floods episode by fouling "raised stores of clean water" (page 220). At the same time, however, it has also been possible for the lagoon to pollute the area in question because that part of Lagos is already filthy anyway. It is, in fact, one of the traditionally dirty parts of Lagos. In other words, the area is already filthy and smelly before the floods arise, so that all the lagoon, and the rain water and the sea, do is compound the already filthy atmosphere. For instance, the items used in offering the sacrifice to the gods which are described in the floods episode have been there long before the incident of the floods and they are definitely fouling elements: "Bobbing potsherds, soot-glazed without and fouled within by congealed meeses of oil and coins and the sacrificial fowl..." (page 220).

Similarly, the atmosphere has already been fouled by the stinking carcass of a goat before the coming about of the floods makes matters worse ("A dead goat, enormously distended, was wedged against a corner of the planks...." - page 220). In addition, there are also already in the area in question a good number of other objects which have made that part of the Lagos landscape dirty before the floods come into the picture. These objects, now submerged by the risen flood water are: late corn stalks and a "heavy course of other objects" (page 221). And there is also already a "rotted half of a canoe" in the area before the floods sweep in (also page 221).

In another traditionally filthy part of the Lagos landscape, Isale-Eko, water is also closely associated with filth and stench. It is in fact, in this area that we have the greatest concentration of filth and pungent smells in the society portrayed in The Interpreters.

In order to show how this is the case, the passage which contains the description of Isale-Eko is reproduced and discussed in some detail below:

... Sagoe, awaiting the arrival of the full complement of the Board of Interview, made his first tour of the premises (1). The area had been chosen, according to Mathias, for reasons of pure political strategy (2). Every loud city has its slums, and Isale-Eko symbolised the victory of the modern African capital over European nations in this one aspect of civilisation (3). A few foreigners seeking off-beat local colour found it always in Isale-Eko; daring its dark maze they admitted that their experience was unique, there was hop-sotch to be played among garbage heaps, and the fainthearted found their retreat cut off by the slop from housewives' basins (4). "Independent Viewpoint" owned a large building in the slum; the paper itself was a party organ, its location meant easy patronage of local thugs, and Isale-Eko was rich spawning ground (5).

Mathias explained, 'Na local bickler come make alteration for inside (6). De wall done rotten to ground, so den bring them fat woman come lean for the wall (7). Na private house before before, so dey knock down de wall turn am to office (8). Na dem own wife dey take body knock de wall for ground (9). And he roared away for a full minute (10).

Sagoe looked through the rear window (11). The wall dropped sheer onto a canal which led water into the lagoon (12). This water was stagnant, clogged, and huge turds floated in decomposing rings, bobbling against the wall (13). He turned to Mathias, 'How do you work in this stench?' (14).

'Ah, na so everybody dey say first time (15). But make you look me now, I just dey grow fat for the smell.' (16)

Sagoe asked to be shown the canteen (17). He paid for a coffee but could not drink it (18). The two halves of the cup were held together by accumulated filth in a deep crack (19). And it was difficult to tell what gave the special quality to the smell in the canteen, there was the greasy water in which yesterday's lunch-plates were soaked, or it could be the sweaty girl who served the staff in a stupor, a mere eighteen at the most, and her movements suggested a knee-deep wadding of sanitary towels (20). And she remained clogged all twenty-eight days of her cycle (21). Eyelids gelled to - it would appear - her navel, her only extraneous movement was to wipe her forehead with an arm that revealed an armpit in alternate streaks of black and white, powder and grime (22). Her whitened face further confirmed a daily toilet of powder, never water (23).

On an impulse Sagoe asked, 'Did you ever answer the telephone?' (24).

'Eh?' (25).

'I asked, are you sometimes the telephone operator?' (26).

'Me myself?' (27)

'Yes, do you sometimes work on the...oh never mind.' (28) And Sagoe gave up in despair (29). For how would he explain to her that the sluggish bilge-water which twice, when he called the paper, lapped the receiver at the other end seemed to evoke the same squelch as her piano-key armpits. (30)

He ran into Mathias at the door (31). 'Oga, make you no go far o.' (32)

'I'm leaving, Mathias (33). Can't wait any longer for your board members' (34).

(pages 72-73)

Sentences (6), (7), (8), (9), (15), (16) and (32) are couched in the

form of Nigerian Pidgin.⁸ Here are translations into Standard English of the utterances concerned:

- (6) "Mathis explained, 'It was local bricklayers who made alterations in the previous building.'"
- (7) "The wall was completely rotten, so they brought their fat wives [that is, their wives, who are fat] to break it down by leaning on it."
- (8) "'It used to be a private house, but they turned it into an office after breaking down the wall.'"
- (9) "'It was their own [fat] wives who knocked down the wall by leaning on it.'"
- (15) "'Ah, that's what everyone says at first.'"
- (16) "'But as you can see, the smell only makes me grow fat.'"
- (32) "'Please don't go far [since it will be your turn any time now].'"

NOTE: The term "Oga" is simply a marker of respect, which has no equivalent in English. It means, literally, "Master".

One thing that one notices fairly easily in the extract reproduced above is that Isale-Eko is an extremely filthy and smelly place. Sentences (2-5) are quite specific on that issue. Isale-Eko is a slum; the lexical items slum and location (5) are cohesively related to the area (2) and Isale-Eko and slums (3). The item slums, however, has a wider scope of reference than slum does: slum is specific to Isale-Eko while slums refers to modern African capitals in general, of which Lagos is one. The slum areas of these capitals always make their presence felt, thus giving, in a sarcastic sense, a distinct African flavour to the capitals involved. That is why Isale-Eko symbolises the "victory of the modern African capital over European nations..." (3).

⁸ There is a discussion of certain features of this language in the next chapter.

It is this African flavour that makes Isale-Eko unique, and which therefore makes some foreigners dare its "dark maze"(4). This factor sets the satirical tone of the entire passage. The distinguishing features of the slum that is Isale-Eko are then set out: children play among garbage heaps, and the streets are liberally doused with slop from housewives' basins(4); the water of the canal behind the "Independent Viewpoint" building is stagnant, clogged and it contains huge turds which "floated in decomposing rings", bobbling against the wall as they do so (13); and the stench is overwhelming (14). Since they all contribute to the description of Isale-Eko the slum, therefore, the underlined lexical items - garbage heaps and slop (4); water, stagnant, clogged, turds, decomposing (13); and stench (14) - belong together in a similarity chain⁹. Isale-Eko, too (3,4,5) as well as slum (5) and slums (3) also belongs in this similarity chain, in that they are linked together through the cohesive relation of collocation.

The satirical tone of the extract being considered here is enhanced by the fact that the offices of the "Independent Viewpoint" newspaper are situated right in the midst of the slum. The walls of the private house which was converted into those offices were completely rotten before it was renovated. But there does not seem to have been much change after the renovation: the canteen is filthy and smelly and the toilet used by the male junior staff is a health hazard, so much so that it is unsafe to laugh anywhere near the place, for fear (from

⁹ Of course, one could go further to identify and describe finer degrees of delicacy in relation to the classification of the relevant lexical items in the passage currently under discussion into identity chains and similarity chains. However, it is difficult to do this at this point in this thesis without becoming irrelevant.

Sagoe's point of view) of taking in too much of the contaminated air in and around the toilet ("...the wit rendered him[Mathias] so helpless that Sagoe feared for his health with such huge intakes of air" - page 76).

There are tell-tale signs of filth everywhere in the canteen. Sagoe cannot drink the coffee for which he has paid because "the two halves of the cup were held together by accumulated "filth in a deep crack" (19). And the smell, too, is anxious not to be left out. There are two "candidates" vying for the "honour" of being the source of the "smell" in the canteen: a) the "greasy water in which yesterday's lunch-plates were soaked"; and b) the teenage girl who "served the staff in a stupor"(20). Attention is, in fact, focussed on this girl, which suggests that she at least contributes substantially to the smell in the room. She is slovenly - dirty in appearance and clumsy in her movements which are clogged by a "knee-deep wadding of sanitary towels" (20), which are, inevitably, also stinking. When she moves her arm to wipe sweat off her forehead, she reveals yet another dirty part of her dirty body - her armpit, which is 'grimy' precisely because it is a stranger to water (22). The black and white, powder and grime (22), piano-key feature (30) which characterises her armpit is, however, not restricted to that part of her body; it is also manifested on her face (23). So, the lexical items greasy(water), smell (20); clogged (21); black and white, powder and grime (22); and piano-key and squelch (30) also belong in the same general similarity chain that has been identified earlier.

The implication of this description of the girl's filthy appearance is that she is an embodiment of the slum that constitutes Isale-Eko. Her consciousness is characterised by a slum mentality, which

has rendered her life a hopeless waste. And for someone so young, (she is "a mere eighteen at the most" (20)), it is a tragedy to have been caught up in such a hopeless situation. This observation is reinforced by our realisation that children play hop-scotch among garbage heaps in the slum(4): they may grow up to be like the girl. And since various parts of Lagos are also filthy, the pattern is likely to be repeated in some other sections of the city.

3.3 CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing, water is a major source of the filth which stands out so prominently in the Lagos landscape, in the sense that it helps to pollute it further. In this connection, the linguistic factor which is foregrounded in the text is that of the cohesive relation of collocability or lexical collocation. Since filth is so poignantly foregrounded in The Interpreters, it is very likely that it was meant to perform a thematic function in the text. It is this possible thematic function that is examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE SATIRICAL FORCE OF THE FILTH MOTIF

4.1 GENERAL

The question which arises from the preceding discussion is, Why does Soyinka go out of his way to bring the filthiness of Lagos to the reader's attention? In other words, why does he dwell in such detail on images of filth and squalor? In order to answer these questions, I examine in this Chapter and the next the possible thematic function of the filth motif in The Interpreters.

A good way to start this discussion is to determine the reasons, as suggested in the novel, why Lagos has become so dirty. Why, for instance, do housewives throw slop through their windows on to the streets? And why do the junior staff of the "Independent Viewpoint" newspaper urinate in the lagoon behind the paper's offices? (page 76 of text). The answer surely must be that they have no alternative but to behave the way they do. The junior staff urinate in the lagoon and probably excrete in the canal behind the building housing the offices of their employers because the only decent lavatory in the building is constantly under lock and key, as it has been reserved for the use of the senior staff - such as the editor, Nwabuzor, and the Management (page 77). Furthermore, the toilet used by the male junior staff stinks mainly because the flushing system is not working (the "cistern was caked and unflushed" - page 76); and toilet tissue is not provided either ("soggy scraps of newspaper" are "stuck in urine").

There is also probably no running water either, for the excreta smeared on the wall indicates attempts to get hands clean. And we know

for a fact that the sewage system in the society portrayed in The Interpreters is in an appalling condition and that "night-soil men are still lugging shitpans around" Lagos (page 239), even in broad daylight (page 108).

4.2 THE IRRESPONSIBILITY OF THE BOARD MEMBERS IN LAGOS

Some aspects of the filthy condition of Lagos could be blamed on the sudden changes the city has undergone in the past century; so the slum-dwellers of Isale-Eko could hardly be blamed for the total absence of suitable sanitation in their homes and places of work. However, we can still say that there is apathy, laziness and so on, on the part of those people who are able to do something about the dirty condition of the city - the ruling classes. They have power and authority and influence, but they will have nothing to do with the responsibilities that attach to their elevated position in society. Another good example of their irresponsibility is to be found in the poor condition of the roads in Lagos: there are pot-holes of varying sizes everywhere. That is why Sagoe remarks jocularly early on in the story that he goes "prospecting for oil from the pot-holes" (page 15). Also, it is possible for a bus to splash Sagoe with mud while on his walk to Ikoyi cemetery because puddles have formed in pot-holes in the road as a result of the rain which has fallen earlier (page 107). In fact, it is not only on Lagos roads that there are pot-holes; they are also to be found on the Lagos-Ibadan road. Bandele is reluctant to return to Lagos the following weekend to attend Lazarus's Church because he still gets "the bumps" (page 162). We have an idea of how nasty these bumps could be from the description of Dehinwa's drive to the beach at Sagoe's request after they and Kola, Bandele,

Egbo and Lasunwon have left the Club Cambana in the early hours of the morning. At one stage during that drive, Dehinwa turns into a side-street and there is "a succession of bumps" as the car "hit one pot-hole after another"(page 34). One of those bumps causes Sagoe's head to violently hit the roof of the car.

In spite of the poor condition of Lagos roads, however, the car is used as a status symbol by people in the middle and upper classes in the city. For instance, Sir Derinola rides a "long American car" (page 86). He and others like him do not wish to know whether the roads are good or not; all they care about is to display the "symbols of a vulgar opulence" (page 86). How vulgar that opulence is is demonstrated in the description of the crowd in Sir Derinola's funeral procession. There are at least forty cars in that procession, compared to the one battered Vauxhall in that of Brother Ezra (pages 112-113 and 111). And the former procession causes a three-hour traffic hold-up. All this goes on on roads riddled with pot-holes.

The possession of cars in the society depicted in The Interpreters is one of the effects of the change-over from a traditional society to a Western-type Culture. In connection with this factor, at least four of the interpreters - Bandele (pages 235 and 236), Kola (page 162), Egbo (page 234) and Sheikh (page 155), as well as Dehinwa (pages 33 and 34) ride in cars, too. But the point here is that in general terms the people in question see and use cars as a status symbol, an ego-boosting product. It is to show how ludicrous such an attitude is that Sagoe goes about Lagos crowing "over stalled cars" (pages 15 and 107).

In addition, the irresponsibility, or civic inadequacy, of the people in positions of authority in the society of the novel is reinforced by the brief flashback, to Past A, describing the incident of the over-

turned night-cart and trailer at Abule-Ijesha (page 108). It is Mathias who has first alerted Sagoe to this incident. Sagoe then visits the scene with a photographer, who takes some photographs. But Nwabuzor, figurehead editor of the "Independent Viewpoint" (he is not even allowed to be present at interviews at which staff are examined for appointments to the newspaper ; so he has to eavesdrop to know what is going on at the interviews - page 81), refuses to publish them on the comically ingenuous grounds that they would be offensive to the readers of the newspaper. He is doubtless acting on the orders of Management; but Nwabuzor's own attitude smacks of hypocrisy and, therefore, dishonesty, for the situation in question has already become public knowledge - as Sagoe bluntly points out: the offensive substance lies spread over twenty yards "on a main road, in front of a school, in a residential area." Nwabuzor's refusal to publish the pictures thus becomes symbolic of the refusal of the people of the society of the novel to face the truth about themselves, the refusal to "acknowledge the disgusting and embarrassing values" by which they live (Ogungbesan, 1979:4), especially as they have all contributed to the overturned shit: it is "solid and running, plebeian and politician, indigenous and foreign shit", and it is "unified in monochromatic brown" (page 108). This last expression has a reductive effect on the oppositions implied by indigenous (black) and foreign (white, and so on). The black and white people in the society of the novel have been united in their excreta, which is brown. This coming together of black and white is, as has been demonstrated in Chapter 2, an important effect of the fusion of elements of Cultures T and W - which is also the chief reason for the cultural, racial and

religious ambiguities that exist in the society depicted in the text. So, although the description of the overturned excreta as being "unified in monochromatic brown" is meant to be comic, it is comic in a sarcastic way and, therefore, presumably used for a satirical purpose.

The civic inadequacy and irresponsibility of the people in positions of influence and power in the society of the novel, then, are closely related to their hypocrisy, pretence and, therefore, dishonesty. It is this factor that is responsible for the satirical tone in which the description of Isale-Eko is couched. The fact that the offices of the "Independent Viewpoint" are situated right in the slum is significant for two reasons: a) the motivation for the choice of Isale-Eko; and b) the attempt by the members of the Board of the newspaper to isolate themselves from the filthy atmosphere in which they work.

In connection with a), the offices of the "Independent Viewpoint" have been established in Isale-Eko, Mathias tells us, for reasons of "pure political strategy" (Sentence (2) - see Chapter 3). We do not know what this "pure political strategy" is until we get to Sentence (5): Isale-Eko is a rich breeding ground for thugs, so they are handy for use at any time. This is the first direct link that we have in the novel between politics and thuggery in the society depicted in the novel. The second indication that thuggery is a fact of the political life in this society comes a little later in the description of the neck of the taxi-driver whose cab Sagoe has flagged down at one point during his walk to Ikoyi cemetery to attend the funeral of Sir Derinola ("For which party did he thug when he wasn't driving?" - page 108). The connection between the "Independent Viewpoint" and politics is strengthened by the disclosure in

the extract under discussion about the newspaper being "a party organ"(5). From this point of view, the lexical items political (2), thugs and party organ (5) are linked through the cohesive relation of collocation. In view of the foregoing, the name "Independent Viewpoint" becomes satirically ironic - for it refers to a party newspaper masquerading as an independent daily.

Furthermore, we know the type of activity that the Management of the newspaper engage in: threatened blackmail of political opponents. For instance, they refuse to publish Sagoe's article on the wicked treatment meted out to Sheikh by the Board of his Ministry, and Parliament - which he has entitled "Who Engineered the Escapade" - because they have entered into a deal with the opposing camp, who also would have definitely threatened to make public some "revelations" on the Derinola camp. Thus, Sir Derinola's reason for not giving Nwabuzor permission to publish the article is that "'...we have already used it'" (page 94). There is a play on the word use here. Nwabuzor has asked the Chairman whether he could use, that is, publish the article (which from Sagoe's point of view "'was two weeks murderous work'" - page 94) in the newspaper. Sir Derinola, on the other hand, replies that the article has already been used - not published but used to enter into a deal involving a "swap of silences" (page 95) with the "enemy" camp. That deal has enabled Sir Derinola to extricate himself from "some nasty jam" (page 95). It is all part of the unwritten but deeply entrenched code of mutual protection entered into by both sides to cover up their corrupt practices.

Thus the Management of the "Independent Viewpoint" and their political overlords present a front by passing the newspaper off as an unbiased disseminator of news when it is, in fact, a political

party mouthpiece. This element of pretence and hypocrisy is reflected in the way in which the Management of the newspaper try to dissociate themselves from their filthy surroundings by lavishly decorating the boardroom and by locking away a scented lavatory for their own private use. But their attempt is an abject failure, as Sagoe quickly discovers when he goes to attend an interview in the boardroom (page 77). This is the second reason stated but not discussed earlier in this Chapter.

In addition, the Management's attempt to separate themselves from the filth around them lends further credence to the fact of their civic inadequacy or irresponsibility referred to earlier. They cannot be bothered by the fact that the environment in which they work stinks, as long as they can delude themselves into believing that they are not part of that environment. Furthermore, the futility of this disposition is also reinforced by the fact that the Board members, too, have contributed to the filth in their society (page 108). The result is that they sound and look hollow by behaving as if they have nothing to do with that filth.

So, the cloacal filth of Lagos shows on the one hand the civic inadequacy of the people in positions of authority and influence in the society portrayed in The Interpreters; and on the other hand it implies that the filth also operates on the mental plane by serving to characterise, in broad terms, the behaviour of the people portrayed in that society. From this point of view, the members of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint" and, by extension the Chairman of the Board of Sheikh's Ministry constitute a major source of moral pollution in their society.

The clue to this line of interpretation is to be found in a description of the Managing Director's reaction to Sago's supposed rudeness at the interview in the boardroom of the "Independent Viewpoint": "The carcass of the Managing Director swelled, spurted greasy globules of the skin in extreme stages of putrefaction and burst in an unintelligible stream through the ruptured throat" (page 79).

The Managing Director is dehumanised in this description of his behaviour: the lexical item carcass is normally restricted to references to dead animals, not dead human beings. Furthermore, the words carcass, putrefaction, swell and burst are, together, typically associated with or accompanied by the unpleasant stench of decaying flesh. In this respect, this description of the Managing Director is couched in language similar to that used to describe the rotting carcass of the goat in the area near Lazarus's Church:

A dead goat, enormously distended, was wedged against a corner of the planks and two dogs tried to pull it out without wetting their muzzles. They [Kola and Egbo] held their noses against its stink and went forward.

(page 220)

Just as the carcass of this dead goat helps to foul the physical atmosphere of the society of the novel, so also does the Managing Director and, by extension, the other Board Members in the text contribute substantially to moral pollution in that society. Seen in this light, the way in which the dead goat helps to foul the area near Lazarus's Church thus becomes symbolic of the manner in which the Board Members foul the moral atmosphere of their society.

Corruption as it relates to them in the text takes two main forms: a) bribe-taking and b) fraudulent practices. With respect to a) the ¹cuprits are Chief Winsala and Sir Derinola the ex-judge (pages 20 and 80), who is also Chairman of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint". These two men regularly ask for and (presumably) receive bribes from would-be employees of the "Independent Viewpoint": they go to Sagoe after the abortive interview to ask for a bribe of fifty pounds from him (pages 83-87 and 89-93). It is for the purpose of condemning their corrupt practices that Soyinka causes Chief Winsala to be humiliated by the waiters ("the green-bottles") at the Hotel:

Chief Winsala, his huge frame shrunken, his confidence collapsed, waited in deep fog, resigned to the beginning of a shameful scene, degrading to a man of his position (1). To himself, for himself, alone, a stream of belated saws came from his lips, muttered silently while his head shook in self-pity... (2).

(page 91)

This passage can be syntactically analysed as follows:

α - $((\beta$ $\beta))$
 S
 || Chief Winsala, | $(($ his huge frame shrunken, || his confidence
 $- \alpha$ β xed
 P A P A
 collapsed,)) waited | in deep fog, || resigned | to the
 1
 beginning [of [a shameful scene [, [degrading [to
 2 3 4 5
 α A A
 [a man [of [his position []]]] || To himself, | for
 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

^S
 himself alone, | a stream [of [belated saws]] | ^P came | ^A from
^P ^A ^{A^b} ^S ^P
 his lips, || muttered | silently || while | his head | shook |
^A
 in self-pity... (2) |||

The comma after "scene" in Sentence (1) has been put in square brackets because it is unnecessary, since "degrading to a man of his position" is a rankshifted qualifier to the head-word scene, thus:

^m ^m ^h ^{q/}
 ... {of [a shameful scene] (which would be) degrading to a man
 of his position.}]]]

There are three important points to note in respect of the syntactic analysis of the passage above. First, Soyinka's mind-style in the passage is realised through changes in participant relations in the three clauses contained in Sentence (2):

¹
 ||| To himself, for himself alone, a stream of belated saws
 came from his lips | ² muttered silently || ³ while his head
 in self-pity... |||

For instance, the word saws is an inherently abstract noun and so lacks the semantic features of "concreteness", "animacy" and "humanity". So "came from his lips" merely gives to "stream of..saws" the illusion of "animacy", despite the passive implications of "muttered". Thus, the impression which we have is that the "saws" almost seem to be acting of their own free will. Furthermore, the human being referred to in the passage in question does not play any active role in the

incident being described in the passage: "his head shook" - he does not shake it himself. So, the "saws" (proverbial sayings) and the head are acting on their own. The activities of speaking and shaking the head need an initiator or agent, which is typically human in both cases. But here, those activities have themselves taken over control and the human being is impotent.

Secondly, the idea of impotence is reinforced by the prominence of stative constructions in syntactically parallel structures in the two minor β clauses at Sentence (1):

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| β
S | P |
| a. his huge frame | shrunken, |
| b. his confidence | collapsed |

The implication of these parallel structures is that instead of being an Agent, an active force and the Causer of action in others, Chief Winsala is now acted upon by forces both outside and within himself. Embarrassment causes his huge frame to shrink, certainty of shame and defeat cause his confidence to collapse. The threat comes from the waiters, who are poised to degrade him: he is

"resigned to the beginning of a shameful scene", resigned in effect to the degradation that is now surely going to follow. In view of the foregoing, the clauses at (a) and (b) above are stative constructions, in that they describe the mental state which the Chief is in: his body has become "shrunk" and his confidence is going, with the result that he presents an appalling picture. In this condition, he quietly waits for the final degradation to come from the waiters.

Thirdly, there is also partial syntactical parallelism between the two β clauses set out above and another β clause in Sentence (1):

... || resigned | to the beginning [of a shameful scene
 [degrading] to a man [of his position] ||
 2 3 4 3 2 1

The syntactically parallel structures in the passage in question can now be set out in the following manner:

- | | S | P |
|----|----------------|---|
| a. | his huge frame | shrunk, |
| b. | his confidence | collapsed, |
| c. | (he) | (was) resigned to [the beginning ... |

While the parallelism in (a) and (b) above shows Winsala's lack of physical activity, resigned in (c), reinforced by the main verb waited expresses mental activity in the sense that the Chief is mentally preparing himself for the climax of his humiliation. Thus, as he waits for that final moment - which never arrives, thanks to Sagoe ("Put the drinks on my bill. And stop shouting at me" -

- page 92; see also top of page 93) -, certain thoughts go through his mind, as is made clear by the "stream of belated saws [which] came from his lips... "(2). So, although Chief Winsala is not physically active in the extract in question, he is definitely mentally active. The fact still remains, however, that he is no longer in control of the situation into which he has so recklessly put himself; that is why it is with the waiters that the initiative lies.

In addition to the foregoing, as was stated in a different context earlier on in this Chapter and as was also hinted at a few pages back, the members of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint" also indulge in corrupt practices by doing "swaps of silences" with other Boards, thereby hoping to cover up their own moral decadence (page 95 of text). Sir Derinola also tries to cover up his unacceptable practices by using Chief Winsala as a front to collect bribes on his behalf. Thus, while the Chief goes into the Hotel Excelsior to "negotiate" with Sagoe, the Chairman dozes contentedly in the back seat of his "long American car" (page 86). In this regard, Sir Derinola is like the Bale (that is, village Head) in one of the saws which come as if of their own free will from Chief Winsala's lips: "...When the Bale borrows a horse-tail he sends a menial; so when the servant comes back empty-handed he can say, Did I send you?...." (page 92). But the Chairman's cover is blown in the episode in question when Sagoe accidentally sees him by the main entrance of the Hotel ("Beside the young palm shoot in a halved petrol drum stood Sir Derinola..." page 92). So, no matter how hard he tries to present a dignified front, he is constantly exposed.

From this point of view, Soyinka also uses the folk-tale motif to satirise Sir Derinola. This motif has to do with the speculations

and theories concerning what it is that lies beneath the Chairman's cap, which he never removes. What, then, is there on his head that needs covering up so carefully? Some people say that his head "ended in a hole, and others claimed it ended in a triple point and was its own lightning conductor. Others more dubious than the rest tried to find his barber and question him ..." (page 77).

According to the Yoruba version of the relevant folk-tale, there once lived a man called Alade who never removed his cap and who resisted various attempts to find out from him the reason for this strange behaviour. One day, however, he succumbed to the entreaties of his best friend and removed his cap to reveal two horns protruding from his head. The astonished friend kept the secret for as long as it was practicable for him to do so until the uniqueness of his experience overwhelmed him. So, he ran into the forest, dug a hole and shouted the secret into it and covered it up after he had done that, relieved that he had at last got the load off his chest and at the same time remained faithful to his promise to Alade not to divulge the secret to anyone. But later, someone went into the same forest and cut off a branch with which he made a flute. But when he began to play the flute, it was the presumed permanently buried secret that rang out loud and clear : "Alade has (got) two horns on his head". And once that secret was out, there was no stopping it spreading like wild fire.¹

The relevance of this folk-tale to The Interpreters is to be found in the exposure of a secret that was otherwise believed to have been

¹This folk-tale is one in a set of similar tales which I read as a child. Unfortunately, it has not been possible for it to be documented here as a result of the non-availability of the relevant material. There is also a Hausa version of this folk-tale.

safely guarded.

In view of the foregoing, Sir Derinola's "philosophy" about appearances being deceitful ("The cloth does not make the man" - page 65; "A degree does not make a graduate" - page 79) has a hollow ring to it. That is why Sagoe in the first of the two passages of imagined represented perception (see Brinton 1980: 377-378 and Fehr, 1938:105)² in The Interpreters mentally strips the dead Chairman naked - he visualises him as dressed only in "a pair of Dehinwa's brassieres over his chest" (page 64) - in order to reveal an aspect of the truth about him ("He was all right [as a judge] until he let the politicians buy him over" - page 20). Sagoe then turns the bogus philosophy of the dead Chairman on him by thinking aloud in these terms in the second passage of imagined represented perception in the novel: "the shroud does not make the corpse" (page 68). In other words, the fact (which we recognise later in the funeral scene) that Sir Derinola is (going to be) buried in a lavishly honorific manner (pages 111-113) is no clue to the way he actually lived when he was alive. That is why the words of the funeral orator at Sir Derinola's graveside ("...his life our inspiration, his idealism our hopes ..." (page 113), are to Sagoe mere noises which mean nothing. And, in any case, in spite of the vulgar opulence displayed by the mourners in Sir Derinola's funeral cortege, the Chairman is buried just like any other person: "At the Ikoyi cemetery, separated by a hundred graves or more, the two bodies [those of Sir Derinola and of Brother Ezra] accepted now a common destination, passed through to the final expunction" (page 112).

²Imagined represented perceptions develop from the reflective consciousness: they arise from reminiscences, dreams and reveries. See also below.

The grave is, like the rain, thus another "Great Leveller" in the text (page 107 of text) in that it cuts the wealthy and arrogant down to size.

The fact that it is people such as Chief Winsala, Sir Derinola and the Managing Director - as well as the Chairman of the Board of Sheikh's Ministry, who spends his time happily defrauding the government (pages 27-28 and 93-94) - who sit on Boards in the world of The Interpreters makes that world very unattractive indeed.

In view of the foregoing, the filth that is very much a part of the Lagos landscape is, in the second layer of symbolisation, also a pointer to the moral impurities which constitute the social norms by which the Board members lead their lives.

4.3 THE SATIRE ON THE BOARD MEMBERS AS AN INDICATOR OF THE IRRESPONSIBILITY OF THE POLITICIANS DEPICTED IN THE INTERPRETERS

Reference was made in the preceding section to "the people in positions of influence and power in the society of the novel" in connection with my discussion of the way in which the filth motif has been used in The Interpreters to expose the irresponsibility of the members of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint". But the phrase in question does not refer exclusively to those Board members; it also refers by implication to politicians who are, in fact, the most influential social group depicted in the novel. The clue to this line of interpretation is to be found in the fact (which was also hinted at in the last section) that the Board members are also very closely related to the political scene in their society: the "Independent Viewpoint" is a party organ, and its offices have been situated in Isale-Eko because the slum is a rich breeding ground for thugs.

One implication of this factor is that some of the Board members are themselves politicians. This much is made clear in a passage where the members are described as "Compensation Members":

Lost elections, missed nominations, thug recruitment, financial backing, Ministerial in-lawfulness, Ministerial poncing, general arse-licking, Ministerial concubinage...Sagoe occupied the first few minutes fitting each face to each compensation aspect....

(page 77)

There are two important points to note from this extract :a) some of the Board members are politicians who have failed to win elections into parliament ("Lost elections") for one reason or another ("missed nominations"); and b) other members who are not politicians are sitting on the Board either (i) as rewards for services rendered to Ministers and the top politicians, such as "thug recruitment" (this is the third and last reference, in the text, to thuggery being a fact of the political scene in the society of the novel - see also page 123 above), "financial backing" or even for merely fawning on the Ministers in question ("general arse-licking"); or (ii) simply as favours ("Ministerial in-lawfulness," "Ministerial poncing", and so on). It is here that the factor of nepotism comes in. We can morphologically explore the semantic suggestiveness of the neologism /in-law-ful/-ness roughly as follows:

- a. implying nepotism arising through relationships by marriage ("in-laws");
- b. "lawful(ness)" as opposed to "lawless(ness)", that is, legality versus illegality;

- c. "in-laws" as opposed to "outlaws";
- d. the fact that lawfulness is only saved from being awfulness because of its initial phoneme

/1/

One of the members who is sitting on the Board as reward for services rendered to the political hierarchy is the Board Chairman himself, Sir Derinola who, it is suggested in the text, has been appointed to the Board as a reward for his having allowed politicians to buy him over while he was a judge ("...He was all right until he let the politicians buy him over..." - page 20).

One important factor that emerges from the foregoing is that the Board members cannot be expected to be competent because they have not been appointed on merit: their faces bear "the general vacuity and contempt for merit ..." (page 77). This lack of merit comes through very forcefully to Sagoe even on his seeing the members for the first time:

And he wondered if he really had to go through with it [the interview], recalling a desk of illiterate, unctuous, ag[g]ravating toads(1). Who hunted you down from last season's stagnant pools, and constituted you into this obstructive lump and an endowment of the outward sign of matterdom (2).

(page 76)

There is a curious ambiguity in the extract: who is the "you" referred to in (2)? Does it mean "oneself" (that is, Sagoe)? Or has Soyinka been careless in matters of punctuation in that second sentence and omitted the question mark from a rhetorical question, an apostrophe to the Board itself? It would seem that the latter is the case. The two occurrences of you in (2) could not have Sagoe as their referent in the context in which they have appeared. For

the passage in question is another instance of reflective represented perception in which Sagoe, who is the centre of consciousness, thinks about what he sees. After thinking of the Board members in terms of toads, he then goes on to ask how they happen to be where they are: in the boardroom of the "Independent Viewpoint"(2). Moreover, Sagoe of his own accord is seeking a post on the staff of the "Independent Viewpoint". He has not been "hunted down" by the Board members. So, it appears that Soyinka has been careless in omitting to end sentence (2) with a question mark. In addition, there is a typographical error in (1): aggravating has been spelt with a single g.

The important point to note about the passage in question here, then., is that Sagoe immediately sees through the facade of respectability which the Board members present through their lavish decoration of the boardroom. It has been so exquisitely furnished that it could be mistaken for a "banqueting room" and it is also the only room in the building with an air conditioner (page 75). But all this does not deceive Sagoe. The dehumanising metaphor in (1) above is meant to underline how unpleasantly they look in spite of their attractive surroundings. Thus, rather than show how refined in taste the Board members are, the suggestion is that the furniture in, and the decor of, the room have a touch of hypocrisy to them ("unctuous"). Every item of furniture has been so carefully worked over and so carefully placed ("A gold-edged pad lay at ...scrupulous angles to the table edge" - page 75) that the wish to impress on the part of the Board members immediately comes through to the observer. It is therefore not surprising that Sagoe is irritated("aggravating")by their readiness to deceive.

The deceptive front presented by the Board members is also exposed for what it is through Sagoe's characterising them as "an endowment of the outward sign of matterdom". The neologism matterdom here seems to denote the domain or status of pure matter as opposed to spirit or mind - that is, pure brute physicality without intellectual content. It may also have undertones of "people who matter", that is, are important socially. The implication, then, is that the Board members feel that their exhibition of a vulgar opulence can cover up their ignorance: they are barely literate, except for Sir Derinola, who is an ex-judge. It is largely because they are not sufficiently literate that their faces bear an air of "general vacuity and contempt for merit" (page 77).

Although Sir Derinola does not seem to lack merit like the other members of the Board (page 77), he, too, cannot be expected to be efficient since (as has been pointed out in this Chapter) he is too corrupt to be of any useful service to his society: he takes bribes and enters into "swaps of silences" with opposing camps.

The implied incompetence of the members of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint", then, is a reflection of that of the Ministers who have appointed them, as well as that of those politicians who have managed in one way or another (thuggery and "missed nominations" imply intimidation of political opponents and even rigging of elections) to win elections to parliament. These people are all opportunists who have singularly exploited, and continue to exploit, the benefits accruing from the impact of Culture W on Culture T to their own selfish advantage. As a result, they are neither willing nor indeed able to run the affairs of state. All they are concerned about is the acquisition of material wealth for themselves, ("...it's every

man for himself'" - page 96) and not with altruistic considerations.

In view of the foregoing, the satire on the Board members is to be seen in terms of the stylistic realisation of the satire on the politicians in the society of the novel. Thus, while the politicians remain largely in the background ⁱⁿ the text, their irresponsibility and intellectual limitations are foregrounded through the satire on the Board members. The membership of the Board of even a party newspaper of people such as Chief Winsala, who drinks whisky in the morning, schnapps in the evening and who simply sleeps in the afternoon (page 83; see also Gakwandi (1977: 74)) is a sad reflection on the state of the society of the novel, in which politicians stand out as the most influential social group.

The suggestion which emerges from the novel in relation to the irresponsibility of the politicians - especially the Ministers - is that they are incapable of running their country because they lack adequate formal education, with the result that they have not been mentally equipped to deal with the socio-political realities of their society. The implication of this factor is that since the type of formal education in question (that based on the Western tradition of literacy) is a product of Culture W, the individual in the society of the novel needs to have it at least to a certain extent so as to have some idea of what it is that is going on in that society. Formal education will enable him to gain an understanding of Culture W, however vague that understanding might be, thereby making it possible for him to keep abreast of the changes going on all the time around him instead of remaining perpetually in the past. Formal education in this respect means progress. Egbo's indefatigable aunt, who took over his

upbringing after his parents' death, recognised this factor very early on in Egbo's life: "...to school you must go, said the aunt, to school you must go in Lagos like a civilised being....."(page 55). And the Osa Descendants Union, too, recognise the usefulness of having an "enlightened [that is, educated in the Western tradition] ruler" for Osa, presumably because they feel that Osa would make good "progress" under such a ruler (page 12). As a result of the foregoing, failure to have adequate exposure to formal education can only contribute more to the disorientation of the individual, as it has done in the case of the politicians.

The key to the attainment of this education is the acquisition of proficiency in the English Language, which is the language of government in the society of the novel, as the Honourable Chief Koyomi's attempt to plagiarise Sagoe in Parliament clearly shows. The Chief picks Sagoe's brain at a party ("...You journalists only criticise destructively, why don't you put up some concrete proposal ...for improving the country in any way..." - page 238) and then proceeds to misquote him on the floor of the House, pronouncing "metaphysics" as "mental physics and chemistry" (page 239). Chief Koyomi's mispronunciation of "metaphysics" is a reflection of the low level of formal education which he has attained prior to his political career, since the level of proficiency attained in English is indicative of the level of formal education one has attained. It therefore shows that Honourable Chief Koyomi has very likely only been educated to the primary level (see Afolayan (1968)). Furthermore, our realisation that the Chief is a representative sample of politicians in general shows that the other politicians hinted at in the text are not much better off.

Similarly, we know that the Managing Director and Chief Winsala belong in the same category with Chief Koyoni (in that they have not had much formal education) from the substandard English which they speak. For instance, after the members of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint" have, in the interview episode, recovered from the initial shock brought on by Sagoe's unexpected answer - "'I don't know'" (page 78) - the Managing Director remarks, "'Well, if the candidate does not even know why he comes for interview, I think we also cannot know why he is here?'" (page 78). The verb comes has not been used appropriately, for it gives the impression of something done habitually (Sagoe attends interviews in the boardroom regularly and does not always know why he has gone there to attend the interviews), a meaning which does not fit the context here. So, the simple present perfect form has come would have been more appropriate. And too would have served a more useful purpose than also.

Similarly, the Managing Director's next statement reveals further grammatical inaccuracies: "'...You small boy, you come here begging for job...'" (page 79). The indefinite article a is glaringly missing from what should have been its usual position in this brief extract - immediately before the word job, which is a countable noun. For countable nouns are obligatorily preceded by an article when they occur in the singular form. Furthermore, "small boy" is an example of Nigerian English. It is usually pronounced "small / boy" in which case boy is stressed while small is not; and it typically refers to a junior (though not necessarily juvenile) and relatively menial employee who does "odd jobs". So, by referring to Sagoe as a "small boy", the Managing Director hopes he is putting him in his place, just as Mrs Oguazor also tries but fails to put Monica Faseyi in her place.

Thus, Sagoe is "inferior" from the point of view of the Managing Director, who also assumes that he must have therefore come to the interview to beg for a job. This is in spite of the fact that Sagoe is well-educated. In fact, it is this reason that annoys the Managing Director the most: "... 'These small fries they all think they are popularly in demand, just because they have a degreee...' " (page 79). The deviant expression here is "small fries". When modified by the adjective small, the plural form of fry remains fry; it never becomes fries.

What the Managing Director is trying to tell Sagoe is that his chances of getting the job for which he has applied depend on how good he is at fawning on, and being submissive to, the Board members. This line of interpretation is given credibility later on in the story when Chief Winsala and Sir Derinola visit Sagoe at the Hotel Excelsior to collect a fifty-pound bribe from him (pages 83-87 and 89-92). It is also reinforced by another utterance of the Managing Director : "... Suppose you are not begging who is interested in that? (1). Your betters are begging my friend go and sit down" (2). The lexical item bettors typically collocates with elders - for example, one's 'elders and bettors' - and, used in this way, it refers to "older, wiser and more experienced people" (Hornby, 1977:78). So, the idea of age and experience usually comes in. But it is reasonably clear from the immediate context in which the latest extract above occurs that that is not the sense in which the Managing Director is using bettors. He seems more likely to be referring to better-educated people than Sagoe is, who are not necessarily older than he is; in other words, certain other young men ("small boys") who are better qualified, academically and/or professionally, than Sagoe is. What we have in

the example in question, then, is a deviant use of bettters.

The grammatical status of (2) can be further clarified as follows:

- (a) ||| 'Your betterts are begging, my friend. ||| Go and sit down.' |||
- (b) ||| 'Your betterts are begging (you to) go and sit down.' |||

Clearly (b) is inappropriate in view of the earlier use of "begging for job", and because the Board, as Sagoe's "elders and betterts", would not dream of "begging" anything of him. In other words, the implication seems to be: "Better candidates than you are begging (for this job). Therefore go and sit down." The expressions "go and sit down" and "my friend" are further instances of Nigerian English. The Managing Director is not telling Sagoe to re-join the other, waiting candidates; he is telling him to stop putting on airs (he should be begging like every other candidate). Also, although the Managing Director is clearly being rude to Sagoe, he refers to him as "my friend". The expression does not therefore have the usual connotation of love and affection for, and genuine interest in someone. Rather, it is a mark of contempt. This observation is reinforced by further examples of similar uses of "my friend" elsewhere in The Interpreters. The village Head of Ijioha uses it to tell Sheikh off: "'If you want to test it [Sheikh's experimental power station], my friend, just uproot your funny thing and carry it with you. Go and test it in the bush, or in your home town..." (page 30). Similarly, a hanger-on around Simi also uses the expression to warn Egbo off her: "'Remove yourself, my friend.' And he pulled again...." (page 58).

In addition to the foregoing, Chief Winsala's lack of adequate formal education is also exposed through the way he speaks the English

Language, in the following manner. He omits the article before countable nouns used in the singular (" '[A] Young man should be independent of his father'" - page 83, " 'You are more like [an] American, straightforward'" - page 84); he uses tense forms wrongly, (a) substituting the present tense for the simple past (" 'You are a bad boy the other morning'" - page 83, "'You yourself have seen the numerous number of clients who come to interview that job the other morning '" - page 84: there is also redundancy in "numerous number", clients is a wrong word to use in this context (the correct word is applicants) and "to interview that job" is a clumsy expression); and (b) substituting present participial forms for other tense forms ("'. ... but now everyone is having degree'" - page 84 (for everyone now has or wants to have a degree or degrees"))).

Furthermore, Chief Winsala uses prepositions wrongly, substituting on for in (" 'The Englishman has not left much of his diplomacy on you'" - page 84); his utterances lack grammatical concord and agreement (" 'I like the American, they are not like the English..' "- page 84); he wrongly substitutes singular forms for plural (" 'Degree is two for a penny'" - page 84 (for "'Degrees are two a penny'")); he omits crucial lexical and grammatical items (" '...everybody is rushing to fill all [available] vacancy'" - page 84, " '...if you like we will [have a] bet on it...' " - page 85); and he also mispronounces at least two related words, substituting the fricative /ʃ/ for the palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ (" 'You are sheeky' " [ʃikl / for /tʃikl/] - page 90, and " 'If you sheek me I will get you sacked' " [ʃik / for /tʃik/] - also page 90 (see O'Connor, 1973: 138 and 139)).

There is one more example of Chief Winsala's sub-standard English that needs to be commented upon very briefly: " '...too much cunny for

English man, so so diplomacy... '" (page 84). The words cunny and so so belong to the vocabulary of Nigerian Pidgin and not to that of Standard British English. For instance, cunny - which has been borrowed from Standard English (from cunning, to be precise) - belongs to the same lexical set, in Nigerian Pidgin, with wayo, which refers to the idea of someone being tricky (Mafeni, 1971: 105). Also, although so so has the appearance of being an English expression it is, from the linguistic environment in which it occurs in The Interpreters, actually a word in the vocabulary of the Nigerian Pidgin English: só só (spoken with a high tone). Só só is thus one of those 'English loan-words' in Nigerian Pidgin which are capable of entering into collocations which are un-English, with resultant semantic extension or the creation of a completely new lexical item" (Mafeni, 1971: 104). It therefore belongs to the same lexical set with such Pidgin words as bád bád (meaning "delicious" or "tasty"), bèn bèn (meaning "crooked" or "shady"), bèg bèg (meaning "indiscriminate request for aid or charity"), and so on. All of these words have been formed by the process of reduplication.³ The following, then, is a linguistic description of the Pidgin sósó:

	English origin	Pidgin meaning
<u>sósó</u>	<u>so</u>	"always"
(Mafeni, <i>ibid.</i> , page 104)		

Coupled with the foregoing is Chief Winsala's use of for in the example in question:

³ The term "reduplicatives" is used to describe those compounds in Standard British English which have two or more identical or slightly different elements - for example, goody-goody, see-saw, dilly-dally, and so on (Quirk *et al.*, 1974:1029-1030).

'...too much cunny for English man... '

Again, this use of for is un-English; but the preposition occurs in Pidgin in ways similar to the way in which Chief Winsala has used it here - to refer to the fact that English people are, according to him, fond of behaving in the manner which he has stated. The following three examples - all of them from the speech of Mathias - illustrate some of the ways in which for is used in Nigerian Pidgin:

1. "'Na local brickler come make alteration for inside...'"
2. "'Na dem own wife dey tak body knock the wall for ground.'"
3. "'...make you look at me now, I just dey grow fat for the smell.'"

(page 72)

The occurrence of features of Pidgin, then, in the English spoken by Chief Winsala is indicative of the fact that his understanding of Standard English is not very firm. This factor also applies with equal validity to his use of sub-standard English in the text.

4.4 THE USE TO WHICH SAGOE PUTS HUMAN EXCREMENT OR "SHIT"

As will have become clear from earlier discussions, human excrement constitutes an important part of the filth of the Lagos landscape. For instance, it helps to pollute the canal behind the "Independent Viewpoint" building, and it also contributes substantially to the stench inside the building itself, as the description of the toilet for the male junior employees of the newspapers shows (page 76). As a result of the fact that "shit" makes up a good part of the filth in Lagos, therefore, it is easy for Sagoe and Soyinka to equate filth with "shit", and to link "shit" with death (page 108).

But there is another reason why Sagoe fastens on shit instead of using the general notion of filth to comment on the state of the society depicted in the novel: he has been obsessed with farting and shit for several years before he left Nigeria to study abroad. The factors responsible for this obsession are to be found in the three extracts from his "Book of Enlightenment" (page 240), which have been taken from his writing on the philosophy of Voidancy and from a flashback to a remote part of Past B (pages 87-89). Those factors are two in number: a) the purgative - castor oil and cenapodium - which Sagoe, Egbo and Dehinwa were regularly forced to drink in their respective homes in their childhood days (pages 87-89); and b) the act of farting by Sagoe's mother, as well as by Dehinwa's aunt (page 71).

Castor oil and cenapodium were generally intended to clear the bowels of the three young friends mentioned above, the belief being that once the bowels were clear, good health was ensured. So, in order to ensure constant good health in them, the three children were forced to drink these purgative medicines either weekly or fortnightly, depending on the whim of whoever was administering the medicines - a role often performed in Sagoe's case by his mother, whose influence on the shaping of the Voidancy philosophy is "more illuminating" than that of Dehinwa's aunt (page 71).

Since farting on the one hand, and castor oil and cenapodium on the other are related by association, in Sagoe's mind, to the workings of the bowels, he gradually began to think of them as aspects of the same thing. It is out of this connection that his obsession with shit grew (pages 96-97 and 155-156).

In respect of the foregoing, there may be a concealed (probably anti-Lutheran) joke in the whole Voidancy philosophy. Martin Luther

was obsessed with his bowels and with excretion, and with farting, and all this got mixed up with his theology. This much is made clear by Robert Nye (1982), in a review of John M. Todd's Luther-A Life, in the following terms: "Here is the Martin Luther who farted when he prayed and gave thanks to God when his bowels were opened. Here is the Martin Luther in whom the excremental and the sacramental met ..." (page 5). There are certainly distinct echoes of this aspect of Luther's life in Sagoe's description of his mother's farting sessions after evening prayers, and of the beginnings of his own conception of the abode of prayer:

'...She was a most religious farter. It was her boast, even as she neared the grave that God's voice was a wind which never failed to speak to her any day after evening prayers. And she called the household to witness, and they said - Amen. My conception of the abode of prayer must therefore begin from those days when the cause of my retreat into the lavatory was not so much a physiological necessity as a psychological and religious urge...'

(page 71)

All this does not, however, mean that Sagoe uses the Voidancy philosophy to comment directly on the filthy state of his society, as Ogungbesan (1979:4) claims that he does. Actually, the reader of The Interpreters could easily be misled into holding this view, especially as Sagoe himself refers at least once in the text to the concept of Voidancy as "the philosophy of shit" (page 71). But as I have just shown, the influences on the development of the Voidancy philosophy are castor oil and cenapodium on the one hand and Sagoe's mother and Dehinwa's aunt on the other. There is no evidence in the

text that the philosophy was developed as a result of Sagoe's dissatisfaction with the state of his native society before he went abroad to study. He must have been aware in Past B that Lagos is a filthy cosmopolitan city but we do not know what his attitude to the situation was at the time. Then he went abroad and either started writing the philosophy of shit in Europe and America or finished writing it in one of those Continents. We only know that he wrote the third extract reproduced in The Interpreters in the United States. In that extract, Sagoe refers to a "critical phase " in his introspection, which has to do with his trying to identify the people in the "portraits" (photographs) which were hanging from the walls of his childhood residence. He goes on, "'...and if I had been in this country where all the facilities are available, I would undoubtedly have graduated into a full-time schizophrenic'" (page 156).

It is the deictic this in "this country," coupled with schizophrenic that implies that Sagoe was in a foreign country when he wrote the part of his philosophy from which the third extract reproduced in the novel has been taken. We suspect that the country involved is the United States because the term schizophrenic implies mental disorder and, by extension, perversions of various kinds. And we know from the text that quite a good number of perversions are, from Sagoe's point of view, practised in America:

...Unable, while in America, to accept that three out of every five of his friends were perverts, active or latent, and that the fourth was in love with his mother, he simply pulled down a cast-iron shutter and developed a judo chop for those whose movements in a darkened cinema theatre left him in no doubt at all.

(page 199).

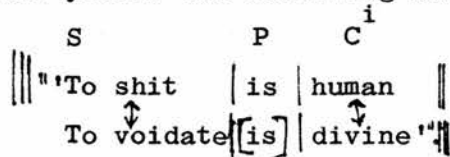
Just as there is no evidence in the text that the philosophy of Voidancy is based on Sogoe's experience and adult awareness of the filthy state of his society before he went abroad, so also is there no evidence to the effect that he uses it to comment on the society in question after he has returned to Nigeria. Rather, he always tries in the fictional present to draw attention to the fundamental differences that exist between the philosophy and the physical realisation of shit. Thus, the sight of night-soil men trotting "around the little windows set in the walls of back-houses" at Yaba profanes, for Sogoe, "true Voidancy" (page 108). At the same time, however, the action of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint" in locking away a scented, deep-carpeted lavatory "for private self-communion" approximates to "true Voidante piety" (pages 77 and 82).

The distinction between Voidancy and the physical realisation of shit consists, then, in the fact that the one is a "religious" experience while the other is vulgar because it refers to everyday activity. Thus, the act of voidating is a symbolic act; the atmosphere for it "must be created, as in a church". That is why Sogoe's "book-and-shovel trips" to the woods to escape the soul-debasing state of the hostel lavatories in France "were mere expediency" (page 97). So, as far as Sogoe is concerned, anyone who thinks of Voidancy in terms of mere excretion is grossly mistaken (page 97). The point about the superiority of Voidancy over shit is clinched in the third extract reproduced in The Interpreters from the philosophy of Voidancy:

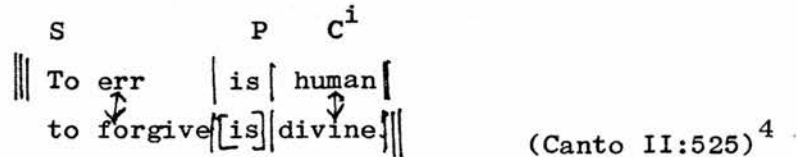
'...To shit is human, to voidate divine...'

(page 156)

A study of the parallel syntactic structures manifested in this brief extract yields the following analysis:



These parallel structures recall the following corresponding parallel structures from Alexander Pope's Essay on Criticism:



On the basis of this analogy, to shit is to err, and to voidate is to do as God intends one to do. "To voidate"⁵ thus becomes a sacramental act and a contemplative one, and never a mere animal release of droppings.

Two crucial points have now been made: a) that the development of the philosophy of Voidancy has been influenced not by the filthy state of the society portrayed in The Interpreters but by the purgative medicines, castor oil and cenapodium, and by Sagoe's mother and Dehinwa's aunt - who were both committed fartars; b) that Sagoe on his return to Nigeria from Europe and America does not at any time, either in Past A or in the fictional present, use the philosophy to expose the filthy moral codes by which the people in his society

⁴The edition of Essay on Criticism used is Collins (1896). The following is the relevant couplet:

Good nature and good-sense must ever join,
To err is human, to forgive, divine.

⁵The lexical item voidate is the base form from which the other words in the "Voidancy" set have been derived. There are three nouns derived from it: voidancy (e.g. pp. 71 and 108), voidante (e.g., pp. 97 and 187) and voidatory (e.g. p. 97). The word voidante also occurs in the novel in mh structure: m h

Voidante dialectics and

M
/
m

Voidante

H
/
sm h

pseudo- negritudinists

There is also an adjective formed from voidate: voidant "in voidant introspection" (p. 71).

(page 97)

conduct their lives. The result is that the Voidancy philosophy does not seem to perform any thematic function in the novel. Thus, it would seem that although the philosophy is prominent in the novel, its prominence does not amount to motivated prominence. If, for instance, Soyinka meant us to take it seriously, one could argue, then he has not succeeded in his design, in that the philosophy has not been properly incorporated into the mainstream of the story told in The Interpreters. And if he did not mean us to take it seriously, then why has he devoted so much space and attention to it in the novel?

On the one hand, then, it is as a joke that the Voidancy philosophy strikes one. This observation is borne out by the way both Soyinka and Sagoe present it to us: as an exercise in comic frivolity. For instance, the reading of the three extracts from the philosophy which are reproduced in The Interpreters is typically accompanied by drinking sessions (pages 69-70, 96 and 155). Furthermore, Sagoe cannot be serious about having meant his philosophy to be part of his thesis (page 70), for it lacks academic credibility. Finally in this respect, the fact that Mathias happens to open the Book of Enlightenment at the page dealing with silence makes Sagoe consider him a genius of some sort ("To have opened it at silence, that was the genius of it."- page 98). Yet, we know that Mathias is hardly literate and that he does not know what Voidancy is all about anyway (pages 70 and 97-98).

It must have been this frivolous nature of the philosophy of Voidancy that has made Eldred Jones (1978:6) comment on it in the following terms:

In this novel [The Interpreters] the playful essayist in Mr Soyinka occasionally prevails over the novelist, making for example, the philosophy of voidancy (a good joke to start with) loom too large, and assume a disproportionate importance in relation to the rest of the work....

So, from this point of view, there would seem to be no justification for the introduction of the Voidancy philosophy, or the philosophy of "shit", into the story told in The Interpreters.

On the other hand, however, it could be argued that the recurrent Voidancy passages cannot but remind the reader of the filth motif, especially as manifested in the description of Isale-Eko and the immediate vicinity of the "Independent Viewpoint" building, the Yaba night-soil men and the brown mound deposited on the road. And while nothing is said about the amenity (or lack of it) or the facilities for "voidating" in Sogoe's own home and childhood environment, his obsession with the need for a clean, comfortable, sweet-smelling, quiet and private sanctuary for "this most individual function of man" (page 97 of text) surely implies tacit rejection of a society which is lamentably lacking in what he feels to be the proper attitudes to, and facilities for, emptying one's bowels in peace, comfort, privacy and sanitary conditions. This is why the Board's luxurious, air-conditioned, carpeted and scented water closet is the one thing he can "forgive" them. Even the radio station's toilet has been utterly filthy. The statement that "Only the toilet of the radio station had, since his return, been so effectively inhibiting..." (page 76) implies that most non-domestic toilets in Lagos have disgusted him.

In the light of the foregoing, therefore, the three passages from the Book of Enlightenment may be a "joke", but that joke is not utterly gratuitous or wholly unrelated to some of the serious (if satirical) themes of the novel.

This observation is reinforced by our realisation that Sagoe uses, in The Interpreters, the notion of excrement at least once to characterise an object which disgusts him. The relevant episode here is the funeral one in which both Brother Ezra and Sir Derinola are buried at the Ikoyi cemetery (pages 110-113 of text). In the boot+coffin visual image ("...the car was moving with an open boot and the turd which stuck out so disgustingly was the coffin" - page 111), the notion is that of a literal piece of excrement protruding from an anus, with the ^{possible} implication being indignity; the coffin juts out of the boot of the battered car serving as the hearse in an undignified manner. The unpleasant picture presented by this spectacle is compounded by the fact that the coffin itself has been crudely designed, a factor which makes it very unpleasant to look at ("...it was ornately gilt in the cheapest tinsel and shone with wax polish of a rabid red. It looked like the perfect tongue of a cola-nut⁶ addict"- page 111).

Nor is this all. The mourners in the sparse procession following the makeshift hearse (they are a mere eleven in number) are themselves awkward in their appearance: they are dressed in such ill-fitting clothes and tennis shoes "that lacked laces and collars sunken in part" that they "make death quite ...ignoble" indeed (page 111).

In addition to using the word turd to characterise the coffin

⁶This word is also rendered as "kola" (which is the shortened form for "kola-nut", or "cola-nut" in the text (page 85). It is not clear which version of the word Soyinka actually intended.

referred to above, however, Sagoe also uses it as a synonym for the vulgar term shit to refer to Lazarus and another man who we recognise from the socio-cultural setting in which The Interpreters has been written to be a self-proclaimed Christ with the fanciful title of "Jesus of Oyingbo". This is a man who was actually alive in Lagos at the time the novel was written. He boldly announced that he had come, at the Second Coming, to enjoy himself and not to suffer, as the first Christ did (page 180). After the service which the interpreters, as well as Dehinwa and Lasunwon, attend in Lazarus's Church, Sagoe thinks of writing an article comparing this so-called Christ and Lazarus (who is emphatic that he is not Christ but who nevertheless claims to have once risen from the dead - pages 164-177 of text) so as to see who is the "fitter turd" ("Survival of the fitter turd... that's four pages - with pictures" (page 181)). The implication of all this is that both Lazarus and "Jesus of Oyingbo" strike Sagoe as disgusting, valueless, waste products of society.

Sagoe's use of "turd" to describe his opinion of the two men in question here is also reminiscent of his use of the lexical item shit to show his revulsion at a remark of Joe Golder's ("... 'If I ever hear you talk that kind of shit again....'" - page 194); and of his use of the word sick to sum up his impression of the American's sitting-room ("...the room was repellent. It gave a crawling sensation down his back and he mouthed the American word - sick!" - page 195).

4.5 CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion has shown that the filth motif has been foregrounded in The Interpreters for the purpose of satirising the Board members, and consequently, the politicians portrayed in it. The foregrounding of filth has, in turn, been realised by means of

certain lexical motifs such as turd, clogged, decomposing and so on.

But it is not only the Board members and politicians that have been satirised in the text; the intellectuals portrayed in it are, too.

The way in which the satire on them has been stylistically realised is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

THE "LIVING DEATH" MOTIF AND ITS THEMATIC FUNCTION

5.1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN "SHIT" AND THE LIVING DEATH MOTIF

In addition to characterising events and people he disapproves of in terms of turd, or "shit", Sagoe also at least on one occasion in the text does link "shit" with death: "Next to death, he decided, shit is the most vernacular atmosphere of our beloved country" (page 108). But although there is only this one example of a direct relationship between "shit" and death in the text, it is worth paying attention to, as the following discussion shows.¹

We have seen in Chapter 3, that shit, as well as filth in general, is a major distinguishing feature of the Lagos landscape. We also saw, in Chapter 4, how this factor has acquired symbolic significance in The Interpreters. We are therefore able to account for human excrement and filth on both the literal and figurative levels of interpretation. But when we relate shit to death and vice versa, we find that "literal interpretation is baffled" (Leech, 1969: 154). For there is no indication in the text that the fact of death (or of dying) is in any way peculiar to the fictional world depicted in it. The example of a man spending his entire life "just feasting on a dead man," which occurs in the passage describing the nature of funerals in that

¹ A novel which also makes use of the filth and death motifs, but on a more elaborate scale is The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born by the Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah. This novel is, in fact, very similar to The Interpreters in terms of the linguistic-stylistic realisation of its subject-matter, as well as that subject-matter itself.

world (page 112) only goes to show the wasteful nature of funeral ceremonies in the society and not the fact of death as such. Furthermore, the fact that certain people die or are reported dead in the novel (Egbo's parents - page 16 ; Sir Derinola - pages 20 and 68; Brother Ezra - page 111; Sheikh - page 155 and "Noah" - pages 236 and 237) does not make the fact of death peculiar to the society in question.

We therefore have to work out a figurative interpretation, within the limits of the scope offered by evidence from the text. The clue to this interpretation is to be found in Sagoe's impression of the short Moloney bridge which is on the Lagos Island. This is

a near symbolic-bridge because of its situation, separating the living from the dead. And among the dead Sagoe included the suburban settlements of Ikoyi where both the white remnants and the new black oyinbos lived in colonial vacuity.

(page 111)

On the literal level of interpretation, the Moloney bridge connects the rest of the Lagos Island with Ikoyi, where there is also a cemetery. So, the bridge in this sense separates the living (Lagos Island) from the dead (Ikoyi). But Ikoyi does not consist only of a cemetery; there are people living there, too. However, although in a literal sense these people should be included among the living, in Sagoe's view they too are dead. It is this incongruity that forces us to look for a figurative explanation; the people concerned are dead not in physical terms but in a figurative sense: they are the living dead. And they are the living dead because their lives are a hopeless waste: they are leading empty lives by substituting the phoney for the real, the flimsy for the substantial. Thus, just as Osa is

a place of death for Egbo (page 12), so also is Ikoyi a place of death - both literally and figuratively - for Sagoe.

Since it is in a privileged place such as Ikoyi that people like Sir Derinola, the Managing Director and Chief Winsala are likely to have their residences, the "vulgar opulence" which is associated with people of their class in the novel (pages 86 and 112) becomes a clear manifestation of figurative death. Fundamental to the struggles by such people to selfishly enjoy the advantages offered by Culture W and, therefore, modernity is the wish to be like the white man.

In view of the foregoing, the deliberate retention, in The Interpreters, of the Yoruba term for a white man or woman (or, indeed, for a white child for that matter) - oyinbo in "the new black oyinbos" - has the effect of ridiculing the people in question. For the expression "black oyinbo" means "black white person", which is a contradiction in terms. One is either black or white, or a mulatto or an albino, but cannot be both black and white at the same time. Furthermore, the new black élite are represented as clinging to a faded tradition of colonialism by living in Ikoyi, which served as the main residential area for the colonial administrators in pre-independence Nigeria (they live there in "colonial vacuity"). This observation is reinforced by the fact that some "white remnants" of colonial rule still live in the area.

But it is only in a loose sense that we can refer to the Board members and the politicians depicted in the text as "the new black oyinbos"; for there is a very strong hint in the novel to the effect that the expression is meant to refer to the emerging black educated élite in the society, that is, those Nigerians who have received adequate formal education - up to university or college level.

For instance, Professor Oguazor is at one point in the text specifically referred to, in a passage of represented speech and thought, or free indirect style - in which Pinkshore is the "subject of consciousness" (see below) - as one of this social group: "... it was a good thing to perform services for this new black élite [he is referring specifically to Oguazor] which he secretly despised..." (page 49).

One interesting issue which emerges from The Interpreters in respect of "the new black oyinbos", then, is this: although Soyinka refers to this new black élite living in Ikoyi in "colonial vacuity", he has chosen not to use members of this group in Ikoyi as representative samples of the others. He has chosen instead to highlight the incongruities of an educated élite who live not in Ikoyi, in Lagos, but on the campus of the university college in Ibadan as a way of satirising the new black élite in the society in general. What was his motivation for doing this?

The key to the answer to this question lies in the parallel drawn (and referred to above) between the notion of living death and the new black élite in the society of the novel. This notion is developed further to specifically satirise Professor Oguazor and his wife Caroline, in the following manner.

The Oguazor residence is described in the novel as "the house of death" (page 139) and "the house of deaths" (page 148). The use of the definite article in "the house of death" is a good example of an issue raised in Chapter 1 of this thesis, namely, the way in which deictics and articles are used cataphorically in literary texts to project the reader's attention forward to what is to come. It is the "omniscient" or third-person narrator, Soyinka, talking at the point of the story in question. For Sagoe, who is the interpreter

that links the satirised characters in the text with figurative death, does not yet know that the Oguazor residence is a house of death - since he has neither met the Professor and his wife nor been to their house before. Bandele, who already knows about the couple's snobbishness and vulgarity (page 143), does not - explicitly at least - connect their behaviour with death, either literally or figuratively. It is not until Sagoe has been in the house involved for some time that he links it with death. This is how he arrives at his conclusion.

5.2 THE PETRIFIED BRAIN MOTIF

Sagoe is, very early on in the Oguazor party episode, convinced

of Bandele's cautionary statement to the effect that "Appearances deceive" (page 140) when he discovers that he has mistaken some plastic fruits in a bowl for real ones ("What on earth does anyone in the country want with plastic fruits ?..." - page 140). Secondly, before he can recover from the shock of this discovery, he notices more plastic fruits hanging from the ceiling and also flowerpots on the wall. These decorations create in his mind the impression of a "Petrified Forest" - a forest because the hanging clusters of plastic fruits create the picture of a forest - and Sagoe wonders whether those people who live in that forest (that is, the Oguazor residence) also have "petrified brains to match" (page 140). These two uses of the lexical item petrified are related to the Oguazors' bad taste in decor. In this connection, they conform to an artistic norm that has by this time already been set up in the text: the use of petrified to describe crude craftsmanship in the form of the "petrified flower motif" which appears in the design of Dehinwa's wardrobe handle (pages 62-63 and 110); and also failure to appreciate this crude artistic design on Dehinwa's part (pages 62 and 63). So, bad taste in decorating or in designing repels Sagoe, with the result that petrified for him becomes synonymous with bad taste in craftsmanship ("a handle of petrified flowers!" page 63; "the petrified flower motif" - page 110; "petrified slat eyes of his [Sagoe's] aversion" - page 67; "the Petrified Forest- page 140; and "petrified brains" - pages 140 and 148).

In each case, Sagoe is appalled at the way bad taste is flaunted by the people concerned as a result of their inability to appreciate good taste. He makes this very clear when he asks Dehinwa at one point while he is still in her flat on the same morning the story of the novel opens in the fictional present, "'...How can you bear to touch the handle?'" (page 62). Dehinwa's answer about the handle being the best part of the wardrobe makes Sagoe explode with surprise and shock:

'Then your senses must be frozen, like the disgusting thing (1). Why on earth would you want to buy a handle of petrified flowers! (2). And look at the varnish, I tell you I'm going to be sick.' (3)

The simile of Dehinwa's senses being "frozen like the disgusting thing" (1) is not very clear precisely because it does not seem appropriate to describe the wardrobe handle as "frozen". In an artistic sense, the flowers on it have been "frozen", but it is not likely that this is what Sagoe means. So, we shall have to interpret that simile as implying a comparison between Dehinwa's senses and those of the designers of the offending handle.

In view of the foregoing, the idea of inability to recognise good taste is reinforced by frozen: because Dehinwa, the carpenters in the Alagomeji Cabinet Works and the Oguazors cannot recognise good taste, they have inartistic sensibilities. Thus, it is not only Dehinwa's wardrobe handle that is repellent but the whole wardrobe itself: it has been crudely polished ("'...look at the varnish'"). Cheap wood has been "overlaid with varnish, which looked perpetually running" (page 63), in a way like the overturned human excrement at Abule-Ijesha (page 108). Similarly, the coffin which Brother Ezra is going to be buried

in is poorly polished: "it was ornately gilt in the cheapest tinsel and shone with wax polish of a rabid red. It looked like the perfect tongue of a cola-nut addict" (page 111).

So, just as Dehinwa's lack of good taste, as well as that of the workmen at the Alagomeji Cabinet Works, is manifested in the former's wardrobe, so also do the plastic decorations in the Oguazor residence create the impression that their senses too, must be frozen.

In the house of deaths where brains are petrified for Dehinwa's wardrobe handle, Sagoe looked up again and discovered clusters of green grapes and black draped from wall brackets and dripping with the shine of evergreen synthetic leaves.

(page 148)

The opening metaphor contained in , "the house of deaths", has the same referent as "the house of death" (page 139), "Petrified Forest" (page 140) and "Oguazor's Cemetery" (page 206). But one wonders as to why there is a morphological variation in "the house of deaths" (as opposed to "the house of death"). Is it an intentional stylistic variation or an inconsistency on Soyinka's part? The former seems to be the more likely explanation, as we shall see on page 167 below.

The Oguazors' house is a "house of death", then, as a result of their lack of good taste in decorating, or as a result of their frozen senses or of their petrified brains. They are described in terms of bad workmen: just as the carpenters in the Alagomeji Cabinet Works design the petrified flower motif on the handles of wardrobes, one of which (wardrobes) Dehinwa has presumably bought,

so also do the Oguazors design the petrified brain motif on the wardrobes. This latter part of the preceding statement does not make sense as it stands. How, for example, can the Oguazors or anybody for that matter, not only design brains but also design them for wardrobe handles? In order to disambiguate the metaphor in question, we can say that there is a transfer of meaning involved here: the petrified flower motif is now transferred to the brains of the Oguazors to stress how frozen their senses have become. Thus only people with "petrified brains" can be expected to have decorated the house with plastic fruits. The implication of this factor is that the Oguazors' brains have been caused to turn into stone, that is, become inactive in a positive direction. In this way, the literal meaning of "petrify" is also relevant to the living death notion.

There are two colour type grapes referred to in the extract in question here: green and black. They and the "green synthetic leaves" referred to are plastic. It is at this point in the episode under discussion that the Oguazor residence is described as the "house of deaths" from Sagoe's point of view, which suggests that Sagoe thinks of the house in terms of figurative death. This awareness on the reader's part makes the first reference to the Oguazor residence as "the house of death" (page 139) - a description which is purely from Soyinka's own point of view - thematically meaningful.

This observation manifests one way in which author and character engage in co-operative ventures in literary texts. Soyinka is purportedly describing some of the plastic decorations in the Oguazors' house; but he is actually doing so through Sagoe's consciousness. As a result, the paragraph in question is an example of the narrative technique of "substitutionary perception" or "erlebte Wahrnehmung" (Fehr, 1938) or

"represented perception" (Brinton, 1980).

The technique of represented perception is "a literary style whereby an author, instead of describing the external world, expresses a character's perceptions of it, directly as they occur in the character's consciousness." The technique enables the author to "directly verbalize the perceptions without implying that the character himself has verbalized them" (Brinton, 1980:370). In this way, represented perception facilitates the coalescence of the external and internal worlds of a particular character at a given point in the narrative. Thus it personalises reality in the sense that reality becomes for the character concerned relative to the nature of his perception of the world around him. In other words, the character tries to impose some order on his surroundings by bringing to bear on his outlook his own interpretation of what he observes around him.

This fact explains why large numbers of evaluative adjectives, both predicate and prenominal, tend to feature in represented perception passages: they are valuable tools with which the character expresses his (subjective) attitude to what or who he is observing.² This highly subjective—emotional nature of represented perception is a major feature which differentiates it from pure narration, which must be accepted as truth (Brinton, *ibid.*, page 379).³

²See Brinton, *ibid.*, pp375-376 for the unique linguistic markers of represented perception.

³We accept pure narration as truth only because we have no way of contradicting the information it presents, as we cannot pretend to know the characters in a novel more intimately than the author, who has created them, does. So, we have no choice but to accept the evidence presented to us "without question if we are to grasp the story that is to follow" (Booth, 1961:3).

Thus, we can distinguish between the second passage describing the plastic fruit decorations in Oguazor's sitting-room (which is the extract currently under discussion) and the first passage dealing with the same issue (page 140). This first passage does not strike us as an instance of represented perception because Sagoe has not had the time to formulate his views on the plastic apples he has mistaken for real ones before he sees those particular plastic fruit decorations. So, we can say that it is Soyinka directly describing those decorations in an attempt to show the reader what makes Sagoe's tongue go "click-clicking" (page 140 of text). What is more, it is only after seeing those decorations that Sagoe begins to form an opinion about the decor in the room: he now sees it in terms of a "Petrified Forest" and the Oguazors as having brains to match (page 140). The result is that by the time he notices the second major clustering of plastic fruit decorations, he has already reached certain conclusions about the house, which he then characterises as a "house of deaths" in his mind. This explains the morphological variation referred to on page 164 above.

The metaphor of a house of deaths fits in very well, as I indicated earlier in this Chapter, with Sagoe's view of his society, which he sees in terms of turd and death (page 108 of text). So, this metaphor reinforces that view; it is therefore an indication that Sagoe is by now not just observing the plastic fruit decorations in the Oguazor residence, he is also commenting on the objects of his perception. This observation is reinforced by the fact that the metaphor of the house of deaths is immediately followed by another metaphor: that of brains being "petrified for Dehinwa's wardrobe handles". We know from the text that Sagoe has on two occasions at least used the word petrified to describe the manifestations of bad taste. On page 63, he

talks of "petrified flowers" and on page 140, he talks of the "Petrified Forest". So that when the same word appears again, this time in another metaphor on page 148, we recognise it as a word which Sagoe actually uses to refer to what he considers to be examples of bad taste. Furthermore, we also recognise dripping in the same extract as another word which Sagoe has also used before in the text to describe the varnish on Dehinwa's wardrobe. After Sagoe's threatening to burn the wardrobe, later the same morning as the events of the opening Club Cambana scene, Dehinwa dares him to go ahead, confident that "'It won't burn in this rain'" (page 62). To which Sagoe retorts, "'With all that oil dripping from it?..." Oil here refers to the varnish on the wardrobe, which seems to Sagoe to be running paint. Also, the wax polish on Brother Extra's coffin revolts Sagoe (page 111).

In addition, the metaphor of dripping paint also occurs in another represented perception passage in which Sagoe's revulsion at a painting in Joe Golder's sitting-room is represented ("...The tongues which darted from the main gash [in the painting] were wet, dripping..." - page 193). Soyinka also uses the image of running paint to describe the state of mind of the interpreters after Sheikh's death ("Sekoni's death had left them all wet, bedraggled, the paint running down their acceptance of life where they thought the image was set, running down in ugly patches"- page 158). And of course, the overturned human excreta at Abule-Ijesha is "solid and running ... shit" (page 108). So, wet, dripping and running paint and oil, as well as running (and solid) human excrement are used figuratively in The Interpreters to describe and characterise unpleasant objects and situations - mostly from Sagoe's point of view.

While words and metaphors which one associates with Sagoe in the text occur in the passage under discussion, however, Soyinka as implied author has not totally effaced himself. For the latter part of the first clause and the first two words in the second clause in the sentence making up that passage constitute a "perception indicator" or "window opener" - that is, a signal that heralds or introduces the passage as one of represented perception (Fehr, 1938:98-100). Thus Soyinka introduces and Sagoe then "describes" what he sees. This observation becomes clearer when we realise that the first adjunct in the first clause, "In the house of deaths where brains were petrified for Dehinwa's wardrobe handles", has been fronted so as to make it prominent in the sentence, thus drawing the reader's attention to it and, therefore, to the characterisation of the Oguazor residence as a place of death. If that adjunct had not been fronted, the sentence would probably have read:

Sagoe looked up again and discovered, in the house of deaths where brains were petrified for Dehinwa's wardrobe handles,...

in which case the status of "Sagoe looked up again and discovered" as "perception indicator" or "window opener" would have stood out more clearly. So, "Sagoe looked up again and discovered" are Soyinka's words which introduce Sagoe's attitude to the object of his perception. It is in this way that author and character co-operate in represented perception passages.

Furthermore, the fact that Sagoe's attitude to what he is observing is expressed in the passage also demonstrates that the extract is an instance of reflective represented perception: Sagoe is reflecting on what he sees. This factor shows that there is a

close relationship that exists between the technique of represented perception and that of represented speech and thought.

Fehr (1938:102) demonstrates his awareness of this link when he states that a passage of represented perception (his "substitutionary perception") may "easily be interfered with by the course of reflections, it may be swept into the stream of thought. In other words, Substitutionary Perception may be merged in Substitutionary Speech [my represented speech and thought]". This link is described more vigorously by Brinton (1980:376-378) who distinguishes between "reflective" and "unreflective" perception. A passage of represented perception is reflective if it incorporates some of the features of represented speech and thought, and unreflective if it does not. Also, Brinton recognises the crucial fact that examples of reflective perception tend to occur in novels more often than one is normally aware of. This observation becomes all the more important when we realise that it is often difficult - if not impossible - to draw a clear distinction between what one observes and the way in which one sees it. In other words, it is not always easy to draw a line between the image of an object that registers in one's mind and the impact which that image has on one's consciousness, as these two factors are usually fused together.

Most of the examples of represented perception which occur in The Interpreters are instances of reflective represented perception, and they are mainly to be found in Sagoe - centred passages and episodes. The reason for this is that it is largely through Sagoe's eyes that we are made to see the futility of the society of the novel. Thus, as he goes about in that society and observes people

and events, Sogoe reflects on what he sees and the reader also reflects on his reflections, thereby working out an identity of viewpoint with Soyinka with regard to the author's discorsal point of view in the novel.

The Oguazors' inability to think creatively, then, is indicative of their lack of imagination, the suggestion being that Oguazor is mentally lazy in spite of the high level of his educational attainments. Instead of looking at issues critically, he and his wife have allowed the allurements of Culture W to dampen their reasoning faculties. As a result, they have become unrealistic, in two senses: a) they have failed to recognise the fact that elements of Culture T are, as I have shown in Chapter 2 and as I hope to demonstrate further in the next chapter, still a force to be reckoned with in the cosmopolitan society in which they live; and b) their failure to take this factor into consideration has led them to try and live like white people - hence the prominence of the black oyinbo motif in the text.

5.3 THE SATIRICAL FORCE OF THE BLACK OYINBO MOTIF

The point about the use of the black oyinbo motif in The Interpreters, then, is that the new black élite in general and Oguazor in particular feel that their education entitles them to regard themselves as mentally white, since they believe that they have, by having it, captured the white man's knowledge, together with all the attendant social advantages: "...the doctors were the most confident of all, for at the time this was the prime profession, the sign of maximum intellect, the conquest of the best and the innermost mystique of the white man's talents" (page 56). Although "the time" in "at the time" is referring to Past B (the period of Egbo's adolescence when he

slept with Simi for the first time), the point of feeling confident as a result of having obtained proficiency in certain aspects of Western education applies with equal validity to the fictional present.

The Oguazors' pretence to be mentally white is, however, exposed at every turn: they are phoney through and through. For instance, their claim to be mentally white rests on a) their aping of Victorian mannerisms, and b) their pretending to be upholding Victorian morality. The buffet supper party, which they hold to commemorate Oguazor's elevation to a professoriate chair, is modelled on an outworn English social tradition:

From the marionette pages of Victoriana, the Professor bowed(1). The contempt in his manner was too pointed for any error, and it was with the greatest difficulty that Sagoe refrained from looking to see if his fly was unbuttoned(2).

(page 142)

The third-person singular possessive pronoun his (2) is ambiguous as it stands: whose fly is it that is being referred to - Sagoe's or Oguazor's? For one thing, it could be referring to the fact that Oguazor bows so low that Sagoe is curious to see whether the Professor's fly has got undone in the process. For another, however (and this is the more likely interpretation), since the contempt in Oguazor's manner is "too pointed for any error" (2), Sagoe would have noticed it, too. He would therefore have been tempted to look down to see if his own fly is unbuttoned, so as to see whether it is only his failure to wear a tie that has aroused Oguazor's contempt or whether there is a second reason for it.

In addition, the absurdity of the Oguazors' position is further exposed through the ladies' retiral ("...All the ladies retire

upstairs at this point... '" - page 114), which Monica Faseyi effectively sabotages ("I assure you I don't want to go upstairs" -p.144). Mrs Oguazor's attempt to humiliate Monica is counter-productive: it is at her that the reader laughs and not at the English girl. Her bitterness is described in the following manner:

This should have been the end, and a few days before it would have been (1). But this was her first social evening as the Professor's wife, and the scene - it could no longer be disguised - had become public(2). And she, a rare species, a black Mrs Professor was faced with the defiance of a young common housewife, little more than a girl, in her own house, publicly, and the code of etiquette was on her, Mrs Oguazor's, side! (3).

(page 145)

In this extract, it is the fact that Monica is behaving badly towards her as a Professor's wife that Mrs Oguazor finds most offensive. She could have tolerated - at least to a certain extent - the young girl's "anti-social" behaviour ("the code of etiquette was on her, Mrs Oguazor's side!" (3)) if the incident had happened a few days before she makes her first public appearance as the woman behind a professor (1). But she is now a professor's wife and, what is more, the party in question represents for her her first opportunity to show herself off in public as the wife of a professor and she is determined not to fail to make an impression on her guests on that score. She must demonstrate to everyone present that the role of a professor's wife has, as it were, been specially created for her. It is for these reasons that she emphasises the fact of her new status in the passage: she is "a rare species, a black Mrs Professor" (3). It is also for the same reasons that she looks down on Monica, scornfully referring to her as "a young common housewife, little more than a girl"

(3). A rare species and a black Mrs Professor contrast with a young common housewife: Mrs Oguazor is a rare specimen while Monica is a common, ordinary member of the female species. The parallelism which a black Mrs Professor and a young common housewife exhibit is set out below:

	d	e	c	h
(a)	a	black	Mrs	Professor
(b)	a	young	common	housewife

Both Mrs in (a) and common in (b) have been marked as classifiers.

(See Halliday and Hasan (1976)).

In semantic terms, it is common housewife that is opposed to Mrs Professor and vice versa and not just housewife to Professor.

Thus, Mrs Oguazor glories in the fact that she is the wife of a black oyinbo which, to her and others like her, is a prestigious social class, while she sees Monica simply and contemptuously as an ordinary housewife who does not know how to comport herself in the company of fashionable and decent people. Furthermore Mrs. Oguazor implies that by having a black oyinbo for a husband, she too, qualifies to be regarded as a black oyinbo, ("a black Mrs Professor"). From this point of view the Oguazors feel that the new professorship enhances their status as black oyinbos even further and that they must therefore live up to the demands of such an "exalted" position. That is the reason why Mrs Oguazor is bent on cutting Monica down to size; and that is also why Oguazor himself pretends to restrain himself after Kola has committed the sacrilege of dancing with the "disgraced" Monica (pages 145-146) and after Sagoe has rubbed salt in the wound by shouting "'Jolly good... Let's have a juju or a twist instead'" (page 146).

Oguazor's reason for giving the impression that he is calm and restrained in the face of such "barbarous provocation" (page 146) is that "A new professorship called for new virtues, like - magnanimity. The pause before 'magnanimity', which is represented by the dash helps to reinforce Oguazor's insincerity: he is not really being magnanimous about the whole incident. Also, Mrs Oguazor wants to know Sagoe's department in the university (page 150) so that he could be victimised, most probably by being made to lose "his chance of nomination to some committee" (page 146). The fact that Kola should "begin quite crazily to do a slow High Life to the ballet music" being played at the party (page 146) and that Sagoe calls for a juju or a twist shows the absurdity of the ballet music the Oguazors have put on to charm their guests. In addition, the ballet piece being played, "Swan Lake" is the most hackneyed of European ballets set in a romantic fairyland.

In view of the foregoing, the Oguazor party is meant to commemorate Oguazor's appointment to a professorial chair only on the surface. Deep down, it is meant to celebrate the couple's elevation to a more prestigious and, therefore, firmer position within the black élite. They thus conceive of the professorship as a status symbol, just as cars are also used in their society as a status symbol. It is presumably for this reason that Sagoe refers to Oguazor's appointment as an event which "deserves nothing but mourning dress" (page 150). In this connection, Oguazor's new professorship becomes symbolic of the fact that the couple are walking ghosts or the living dead. Thus Sagoe links the tuxedo, which has the normal connotations of formal parties and of gaiety, with death, a factor which highlights further that the Oguazor residence is a "house of death".

As a result of the foregoing, Mrs Oguazor is, in seeking to disparage Monica, also unwittingly exposing both herself and her husband to further ridicule. This effect has been achieved by Soyinka presenting her thoughts in a passage of "free indirect style" or "represented speech and thought". This narrative technique is also described in various other ways,⁴ but I have adopted for use in this thesis the term "represented speech and thought", which was introduced by Ann Banfield (1977) and later adopted by Laurel Brinton (1980) for two reasons: a) it states very clearly the major concerns of the technique it describes (speech and thought are represented, not presented). It is thus at once specific and comprehensive. b) Because it is clear and specific, the term "represented speech and thought" is unambiguous and therefore not likely to mislead or confuse either students or their teachers. This is a pedagogical factor.

Represented speech and thought, then, is that narrative style which "expresses a character's thoughts and speech in the authorial past tense and third person but also in the character's own emotive language" (Brinton, résumé of article on page 363). The expression "the authorial past tense and third person" in the preceding statement implies the presence of two voices in represented speech and thought passages: the voice of the third-person narrator⁵ or author, who is the primary speaker in such passages; and that (or the words) of one of the characters - the secondary speaker (Guiraud, 1971:85) - in the relevant narrative. One result of this factor is that there is, in represented

⁴ Brinton (1980:363) gives a good summary of these other terms.

⁵ The technique of represented speech and thought poses certain problems for first person narratives. The slippery nature of these problems is discussed by Pascal (1962:1-11) and by Bronzwaer (1970. Cf. Lodge (1966:39-40).

The major problems created for represented speech and thought by first-person narratives has to do with the fact that "the narrator and the character whose thoughts or feelings are reported, that is, represented are the same person" (Bronzwaer, 1970:56).

speech and thought passages, free mixture of a character's expressions and the voice of the narrator or implied author. The transition from one voice to the other is so smooth that it is hardly noticeable (Cohn, 1966: 103).⁶ This factor enables the novelist to reveal the "projects, dreams, remorse, hopes and regrets of his characters while at the same time maintaining the perspective of a gaze that observes and judges them [characters]" (Guiraud, 1971:85).

In the passage in question here, there are two voices: those of Soyinka the implied author, who is the primary speaker, and of Mrs Oguazor, the secondary speaker. But we notice that although it is the professor's wife that is doing the thinking in the extract, the third-person singular pronominal forms her and she have been substituted for the first-person singular pronoun I of direct reporting. The reference to "Mrs Oguazor's" at the end of the passage is in appositional relationship to the last her in the passage, thus reinforcing it. These substituted elements (her and she) are markers of the voice of the primary speaker, for they indicate that the process of representation is at work: the primary speaker or narrator is representing the thoughts of the secondary speaker or character involved. The referent of her and she, Mrs Oguazor, is thus the subject of consciousness in the passage in question, as it is mainly from her

⁶ She uses the expression "seamless juncture" to describe this smooth transition from Voice I to Voice II and back to Voice I.

point of view that we are made to see Monica at the relevant point in the novel.

In portraying Mrs Oguazor's thoughts in the way referred to above, then, Soyinka is at the same time "maintaining the perspective of a gaze that observes and judges" her. In this way, her vulgarity and snobbishness come through very clearly. Her vulgarity, as well as her eagerness to impress, stands out in stark relief when we remember that it is she - a "black white woman" or a phoney white woman - and her husband (also a phoney white person) who are affecting Victorian mannerisms and not Monica, who is a real white girl (she is English, although married to Ayo Faseyi, who is a Nigerian). Furthermore, it is this real white girl who exposes the stupidity of the Oguazors' affectation by refusing to retire upstairs with the other women since she has used the lavatory downstairs ten minutes previously and since she does not mind being left alone on the ground floor with the men (page 144).

Mrs Oguazors' antagonism to Monica is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the girl as an individual. She is under the impression that since Monica is white - a real white girl - she should be used to the rules of *etiquette* relating to the tradition of a buffet supper (page 142):

"You are being impossible, Mrs Faseyi (1). And from you of all people(2). I don't understand why you choose to upset everyone in this manner"(3).

"And from you of all people"(2) implies that it is unthinkable that Monica, who is not only white but English, should refuse to retire upstairs with the other women, the suggestion being that she is being intentionally disruptive(3). But it does not occur, not surprisingly, to Mrs Oguazor that it is the *etiquette* of a by-gone era that

she and her husband are affecting, an era of which few young English people such as Monica are likely to be aware. Actually, we know for a fact that Monica is not familiar with the English social tradition, whose rules of *etiquette* Mrs Oguazor is now invoking as justification for her antagonism towards Monica. As the latter herself explains at the Embassy reception, she has never moved in the type of society or company that her husband moves in ("I never moved in such circles"- page 40). She reiterates this point later at the same party when she tells Kola that she had "never lived in a university atmosphere" until she got to Nigeria two years previously (page 46). So, Monica is a simple, though not simple-minded ("She sounds mild but she isn't..." - page 44) girl who has been conventionally trained at a teacher training institute somewhere in England (page 46).

So, in trying to live like white people, the Oguazors have merely inherited the social rituals and protocol bequeathed to them by the former colonials in the form of the ladies' mass retirement upstairs, of the men expected to pretend that it is not happening and using the lavatory on the ground floor. All of these things are rather behavioural status-symbols taken over from the defunct colonialist way of life. In view of this factor, Mrs. Oguazor's attitude to Monica is one of snobbish bullying.

Because the Oguazors are clinging to a faded colonialist tradition, therefore, they are living in a toy-shop world based on the illusion of a Victorian way of life and not on the realities of the present ("From the marionette pages of *Victoriana* the Professor bowed..." - page 142).

The main implication of "marionette" is that of a string-operated doll in a puppet-theatre. It has no will of its own but moves only

because the operator pulls the string. In this case, the strings are pulled by long-dead Victorian colonialists whose manners Oguazor is aping.

The absurdity of the Oguazors' pretending to be white can further be seen in the fact that the negative aspects of the colonial mode of life, which are understandable (though not to be condoned) in respect of genuine white colonials are definitely ludicrous in their black imitators. Some of those negative aspects are:

- (a) retreat into a (relatively) opulent "ghetto" as a sign of "superiority" to, and rejection of, the native black community;
- (b) the inevitably resultant life in a socio-cultural vacuum (vacuity), cut off from their own cultural roots as well as isolated from the local culture.
- (c) a paradoxical dependency on the "outsider" community which they affect to despise, without which their opulent life-style could not exist.

In view of the foregoing, the Oguazors are, figuratively speaking, living in "colonial vacuity" even though they do not in literal terms live in Ikoyi. It is in this way that they are typical of the black oyinbos (that is, the new black élite) in the society of the novel.

One important issue that emerges from the preceding section is the hypocrisy of the Oguazors: they are pretending to be mentally white. Their hypocrisy is further exposed through their pretending to be upholders of a Victorian, puritanical morality. This is the second point mentioned above but which was not discussed. This issue comes through a) in the description of the couple's behaviour in the novel, and b) in a description of the way in which Mrs Oguazor is dressed at

the buffet supper party at her home.

With respect to (a), Oguazor talks glibly about "meral terpitude" ("moral turpitude") and pretends to be shocked by the lack of morality of young people ("The college cannot afford to have its name dragged down by the meral terpitude of irresponsible young men. The younger generation is too merally corrupt" - page 250). The phrase, "moral turpitude", is used in most academic contracts to define behaviour which could lead to a lecturer's suspension, dismissal or to his being cautioned. It is this power of the Senate that Oguazor gives the impression of invoking in the text.

For instance, when at the party Dr Ajilo, presumably one of the lecturers in the university college in Ibadan, denies that he takes prostitutes home ("...Never further than his garage he swore..." - page 148), Oguazor "was just behind him and he was not amused". Ajilo is obviously boasting: he denies that he takes prostitutes to his home - which fits the "respectable" academic ethic - but admits (or pretends to admit) that he never takes them "further than his garage". He is trying to be witty, and it is not surprising that he gets away with his boast in the knowing circles of academic "double-think". In these circles, the pretence is to be knowing and sophisticated about the type of thing Ajilo is talking about, and about other types of campus gossip, such as Udedo not being able to pay his electricity bill ("What does he do with his money?" - page 148) and about Salubi sleeping indiscriminately with women ("He doesn't even keep off the students" - page 148); the reality is to be horrified by the "'meral terpitude'" of it all.

In this type of moral atmosphere, Ajilo cannot lose; if he is telling the truth, he is a "gay dog"; if he is lying, he is a witty,

clever academic who entertains his colleagues with outrageous but untrue confessions of unprofessional conduct. Oguazor's reaction to Ajilo's boast ("he was not amused") shows his weakness: if he knew Ajilo's character thoroughly, he would be able to assess how far the man was lying in order to seem "smart". The suspicion that he may be telling the truth frightens the professor, since the issue involved threatens the defensive academic veneer of respectability which he and others like him so much revere.

Furthermore, Oguazor makes conventional noises about Salubi's reported sexual escapades ("Wen of these days... the senate will charge him with meral terpitute"-page 148): lecturers who exploit their powerful position for their own sexual satisfaction end up getting sacked for "'meral terpitute'". By reacting in this way, Oguazor is merely trying to sound like an academic "big man" who is "in" on decisions of the Senate. That is the code, and the professor lives and prospers by that code although he does not in fact enforce it. In the instance in question, he is, characteristically, foreseeing the day when the Senate will censure or sack Salubi for corrupting students.

We know that Oguazor does not enforce the moral code by which he lives from the

simple fact that he had three sons and one five-year-old daughter only and the daughter gave him much sorrow and pain because he could not publicly acknowledge her since he had her by the housemaid and the poor girl was tucked away in private school in Islington and in fact was Oguazor's favourite child and the plastic apple of his eye...

Again, the plastic apple motif crops up here: the real apples of Oguazor's eye are his three legitimate sons but, not unexpectedly, it is his illegitimate daughter that he really likes (she is the "plastic apple of his eye"). Thus, just as the plastic fruit decorations in the Oguazor residence indicate the couple's bad taste and vulgarity, so also does the fact that Oguazor has an illegitimate daughter expose the vulgar and hypocritical nature of his moral posture in the text. It also punctures his show of superiority and snobbishness. His affected pronunciation of "moral turpitude" ("meral terpitute") and of some other words in the text (end /ɛnd/ for and /ænd/ - page 142; herve /hɛv/ for have /hæv/ / pages 142, 147 and 250; wen /wɛn/ for one /wʌn/ pages 148 and 250; and so on⁷) also serves to underline his snobbishness. Such pronunciation is modelled on similar exaggerations of R.P. sounds by certain types of British would-be snob.

Similarly, Mrs Oguazor, too, appears shocked by the disclosure that the anonymous girl student whom Egbo seduces is planning to return to college the following term ("In her ⁿcondition?" - page 248). She, too, is concerned with presenting appearances and that is why Soyinka uses the way she is dressed to expose her vulgarity and hypocrisy: she is not as mentally refined as she thinks she is, in spite of her showy clothes and ornaments. This is the second point (b) raised about two pages back. This is the impression which her personal appearance makes on Sagoe at the party at her house:

... 'I am Edward Akinsola, you must be the hostess', humming inside him...bells on her fingers, Big Ben on her toes,

⁷ The phonetic model used here is the Gimson model, as used in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English.

and she shall have B.O. [Body Odour] in spite of her
rose...

(page 141).

This passage constitutes an instance of the fusion of the narrative styles of represented speech and thought and represented perception, or an example of reflective represented perception. For instance, it starts off with direct speech, by means of which Sagoe introduces himself, albeit deceitfully, to Mrs Oguazor as Edward Akinsola. But after that introduction, we move from the level of verbalisation to that of non-verbalisation; that is, to Sagoe's reflective consciousness. The expression "humming inside him" serves as an introduction to this reflective consciousness, in the sense that it functions like a parenthetical, which frequently indicates the occurrence in a given passage of an example of represented speech and thought. "Humming inside him" thus performs essentially the same function that expressions such as "he felt", "he thought", "he said" and so on perform when they are parenthesised in represented speech and thought passages (See Brinton, 1980:367). The significance of the use of direct speech in the first part of the passage in question is that it establishes beyond doubt that what follows it is to be looked at within the context of represented perception; for the addresser-addressee relationship which it sets up points to the presence of an object of perception in the immediate environment. Thus, we are sure that Sagoe is looking at Mrs Oguazor as he thinks in the terms set out in the passage in question. It is therefore the way in which Mrs Oguazor is dressed that evokes the thoughts of Sagoe which are represented in the extract.

The latter part of this example recalls the wording of a well-known nursery rhyme based on Banbury Cross:

Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross
To see a fine lady upon a white horse;
Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
And she shall have music wherever she goes.

(Opie and Opie, 1952: 65)

In my example from The Interpreters, "bells on her fingers" has been substituted for "Rings on her fingers" to indicate the type of rings Mrs Oguazor is wearing. Furthermore, "Big Ben" has been substituted for "bells", which still retains the idea of bells. Big Ben is the Westminster clock on the House of Commons tower; it is thus a visible and audible symbol of Britain and, above all, of its capital, London. Its chimes are internationally familiar, too, as symbolic of Britain and its centre of government. As a result, "Big Ben" reinforces further the black oyinbo theme: Mrs Oguazor, to Sagoe, is bedecked with exotic rings and jewellery as part of her plan to present an attractive front. It is because she is concerned with appearances that Soyinka has substituted "B.O." or "Body Odour" for music in the nursery rhyme reproduced above and "in spite of her rose" for "wherever she goes". Thus, no matter how attractive Mrs Oguazor may look on the surface, she is, deep down, a walking ghost. Finally in this connection, although Soyinka may not have been aware of the link between Banbury Cross and Puritanism, one cannot but see an implicit allusion to the fake "puritanism" of the Oguazors: they, especially Professor Oguazor, are only pretending to live by a rigid moral code.

Just as Mrs Oguazor is bedecked with exotic rings and jewellery so as to present an attractive front, so also have she and her

husband decorated their house with exotic plastic fruits for the same reason:

From the ceiling hung citrous clusters on invisible wires(1). A glaze for the warmth of life and succulence told the story, they were the same as the artificial apples (2). There were fancy beach-hat flowerpots on the wall, ivy clung from these along a picture rail, all plastic, and the ceiling was covered in plastic lichen(3). Sagoe had passed, he noticed, under a special exhibition group of one orange, two pears, and a fan of bananas straight from European wax-works. (4)

(page 140)

It is the plastic quality of the fruits hanging from the ceiling of the Oguazor sitting-room as well as of other fruits in the room that is being emphasised in this extract. There are plastic "fancy beach-hat flowerpots on the wall", plastic ivy clinging to the flowerpots (the use of cling and its forms with from is unusual; to is the more common preposition that is used with it), and the ceiling is covered in plastic lichen(3).

The "growing"fruits are therefore as artificial as the plastic apples which Sagoe has seen a little while earlier(2). The notion of artificiality is in turn reinforced by the lexical items fancy (3) and invisible (1). For instance, the wires referred to in (1) are not actually invisible; rather, it is the deceptive nature of their surroundings that makes them appear to be so. This idea of deception is stressed further by the fact that some of the fruits - an orange, two pears, . and "a fan of bananas straight from European wax-works " are exhibited"(4). The word exhibition in "a special exhibition group" has in the context in which it has been used here its usual meaning of "putting certain things on display". But it

also at the same time implies the idea of showing off from the point of view that the objects concerned have been displayed for ego-boosting purposes. This negative use of exhibition should be distinguished from the way the same word has been used in The Interpreters to refer to the posthumous public display of Sheikh's art works ("Sekoni's exhibition had been opened in the afternoon to palm wine and roast meat from the black ram ..." page 243).

It is the Oguazors' bad taste and vulgarity, as well as their desire to impress that are symbolised by the cheap, coy artificiality in their house - as if the whole house were furnished from a "novelty" store. The flower-pots cannot even be honest flower-pots: they are modelled to look like fancy beach-hats. And the words European and wax-works (4) also raise again the black oyinbo theme: the Oguazors are trying to create a European atmosphere in their house so as to be seen to be civilised. But the impression they succeed in creating is that of a "glazed forest" which exposes their vulgarity. From this point of view, the "glazed shore" motif which is used in the text to compare Sagoe's actual impression of the lagoon while he is on his way to Ikoyi cemetery and the impression created of the same lagoon in postcards (page 110) also applies to the Oguazor residence. For the "glazed shore" fits in very well with the plastic decor of the house. Linked to the issue of artificiality and, therefore, lack of reality is the fact that wax-works museums consist of lifeless models of famous or notorious persons. The item wax-works normally refers to such a museum rather than to artificial fruit or the place where it is made. This latest factor reinforces the living death motif even further.

In the end, it is as a fool that Oguazor strikes us in spite of his professorship. From this point of view, Sagoe's first impression of him sums up the reader's impression of him accurately. When, while still reeling under the shock of discovering that the apples he originally wanted to eat are plastic and that the decor of the Oguazor sitting-room (and hall) consists, in fact, of plastic fruit decorations, Sagoe overhears the white owner of the cat Nephritites complain to a man he recognises a little while later as Oguazor (who is not only listening patiently but also "nodding with understanding" - page 141) that the cat is allergic to Africans, he expresses his disgust at the scene without mincing words: "But who is the black fool listening so sympathetically. Who is the bell-boy in the tuxedo?" (page 140). We would normally expect to have a question mark after "sympathetically", but it is missing from the example for no apparent stylistic reason.

There are two things that shock Sagoe about this incident: a) that someone could utter such an arrogant statement as Oguazor's addresser is uttering; and b) that Oguazor could listen so sympathetically to such a rude remark. With respect to (a), the attitude of the white woman in question represents the ultimate in racial snobbishness - even her cat is thought of as being superior to Africans. It should be pointed out here that the invention of the name of the cat is brilliant on Soyinka's part: it is a fusion of Nefertiti (a queen of ancient Egypt) and nephritis (that is, inflammation of the kidneys). With regard to (b), Sagoe is shocked by Oguazor's attitude to the naked insensitivity of the cat's owner: the professor is behaving more like an obsequious waiter ("bell-boy") than one of the woman's academic

colleagues and equals. From this point of view, Oguazor's appalling behaviour strikes one as that of a waiter hovering around a customer, waiting to take his order, as one of the "greenbottles" at the Hotel Excelsior once did, in Past A, before Chief Winsala lost his self-respect (pages 83-86, and 90-93).

The fact that Oguazor is a fool is confirmed for the reader later on at the party when he pretends to know what chandeliers are. Nnojekwe, presumably a lecturer at the university college in Ibadan, has gone to the professor to tease him about his knowledge of certain objects on the wall (page 147). Oguazor, not surprisingly, quickly falls into the trap: "... 'Chandeliers? ... Oh, oh yes,' Oguazor, scared to be ignorant, failed to perceive the trap. 'Very expensive they are but Caroline wanted them so badly'" (page 147). Instead of being honest and admitting his ignorance, Oguazor pretends to know what chandeliers are. The word latest in "And Nnojekwe drew him out a little further, then returned to his group to transmit Oguazor's latest" suggests that pretending to be knowledgeable about things he knows nothing about is a habit with the Professor. We are therefore not surprised that after his experience with Nnojekwe, Oguazor should continue in his delusion over chandeliers. Professor Singer is playing with an ash-tray when Oguazor offers the information that it is one of a set of six ash-trays and some chandeliers on the wall which he bought for his wife's birthday (page 147). Professor Singer, Soyinka tells us, "spent the rest of the evening trying to locate brass chandeliers on walls" (page 148).

The discussion over the last few pages indicates that Oguazor has not been satirised for having been made a professor, but for viewing the professorship as a status symbol and for behaving in accordance

with this notion. Thus, there is no suggestion in the text that he is not professionally capable. The point, then, seems to be that it is "sickening" (to borrow Sagoe's expression - page 193) to see him behave in the way he does in spite of his top academic position. Similarly, as Bandele tells Kola (and the reader) at the Embassy reception, Ayo Faseyi is "'supposed to be the best X-ray analyst available in Africa'"(page 45). Yet he is a whining social climber who is always desperate about impressing politicians and other "VIPs" in the society, with a view to getting some favours in return. Hence, for him, the university is "'...just a stepping-stone. Politics, corporations - there is always something. Not to talk of these foreign firms, always looking for Nigerian Directors..." (pages 202-203).

Since the university is, for Ayo, a stepping stone to greener pastures, he worries a lot about anything which he thinks is likely to jeopardise his obsessive ambition to improve his social status. Since this threat always takes the form of his wife's behaviour in public, it is Monica who constantly bears the brunt of his anger and impatience to move into a more prestigious social class. He wants to know what people are saying about her: he would probably be pleased if they said nice things about her (after all, he married her for the prestige of a white wife.). But he is worried because most of the comments he hears about her are negative. In this connection, Ayo Faseyi feeds on gossip: most of his friends are "habitual" gossips (page 45). It is pathetic that such a brilliant man as Ayo Faseyi should be struggling so hard to get himself accepted in the circle of politicians and Board members - especially Board Chairmen - who, as we have seen are corrupt, ignorant and irresponsible.

Similarly, it is also as a fool that Lumoye strikes us, in spite of his medical training: he is indecent, both morally and professionally. For instance, he tries to destroy the anonymous girl student's character by spreading slander about her after he has failed to get her to sleep with him as the price to be paid before he carries out an abortion for her ("...I think he even wanted to sleep with her and when she wouldn't he said no help..." - page 242).

Furthermore, Lumoye has broken the Hippocratic oath, which he must have taken as a medical doctor, first by trying to sleep with a patient and then by gossiping about her when she refuses to do his bidding. He has thus deviated from an ethical and professional code of conduct which forbids any sexual involvement with patients as well as the divulging of any information relating to the patient's medical history and treatment. So, by behaving the way he does, Lumoye is being utterly irresponsible. He must have a strange notion of confidentiality to assume that a piece of information can still be confidential after it has become an open secret ("...this is really confidential you know, but did you know one of the girls is pregnant.... Second year student, came to me in my clinic and asked me if I could help her..." - page 147).

In view of the foregoing, Bandele is right in describing Lumoye as stupid and a buffoon (page 242). And, of course, we have to see the satire on Lumoye within the larger context of the satirical comment on medical doctors generally in the novel - a factor which was referred to earlier in this Chapter.

As a result of the foregoing, Ayo Faseyi and Dr Lumoye are also characterised by bad taste and vulgarity; they also lack the ability to think imaginatively in spite of their academic training.

Similarly, Lasun^Wwon, who is a trained lawyer (he is a "politician-Lawyer" - page 15), is also imaginatively clumsy, as his clumsy attempt to be philosophical, poetic even, early in the novel shows:

The fish [in the aquarium] began a little amphibious game thrashing wildly and darting suddenly behind a rock to stare at some unseen pursuer (1). Lasun^Wwon watched, turned maudlin (2). Wagging a finger of admonition at the aquarium he said, 'We human beings are rather like that, living in a perpetual trap, closed in by avenues on which escape is so clearly written'(3)....

(page 19)

At best, Lasunwon's statement in (3) nearly says something significant. The fish are fleeing from "some unseen pursuer"(1); that is, escape within the confines of the aquarium-tank is possible because the "pursuer" is a delusion, quite imaginary. But Lasunwon muddles it with his "closed in by avenues" (3). (Escape from the aquarium itself is entirely another matter.) The notion is an interesting one, but Lasunwon is too clumsy to express it accurately.

Thus, while he is frequently close to the five interpreters, Lasunwon is mentally very far away from them. The suggestion, then, is that he follows the friends about in order to boost his own ego, as the word splurges, in "...He dogged their [the interpreters'] company always, an eternal garbage can for such sporadic splurges, and uncomplaining..." (page 15) suggests, and not in order to "follow in their footsteps" in the figurative sense of modelling his values, morals and actions on theirs. Furthermore, the phrase "an eternal garbage can" is an item which fits the filth/sewage disposal set discussed in Chapter 3 above. The interpreters use Lasunwon as a rubbish-receptacle,

intellectually speaking, because he is so pompously stupid (he belongs "in the puddle" - page 23). Kola makes this point forcefully during an argument he has with the politician-lawyer just after Lazarus has invited the friends to attend his church the following Sunday: "'... You have a water-logged, ponderous, unimaginative imagination'" - page 163).

It is because of the factors briefly discussed above that I have not included Lasunwon among the interpreters in The Interpreters (see Chapter 2 above).

The major implication of the black oyinbo motif in The Interpreters, then, is that the black educated élite portrayed in the text have failed to use a vital opportunity afforded them by the privilege of their formal education (which is an element of Culture W) - namely, the opportunity to be rational men and women, to think positively, imaginatively and creatively - to good advantage. The suggestion that emerges from the text, therefore, is that it is good to have formal education as long as its acquisition is matched by a positive mental orientation to life. Thus, to have formal education is one thing, to have a creative imagination is another. Formal education, is, however, important in that if used sensibly and intelligently, it establishes the basis which allows the individual to develop this positive mental orientation. To have it and still be mentally crippled is as bad as not to have it at all or to have it in "half measure" (that is, be semi-literate). It is because Oguazor, Ayo Faseyi, Lumoye, Lasunwon and Golder are still mentally crippled in spite of their university training that they have been so severely criticised in the text.

Furthermore, it is the negative mental orientation of the university students depicted in the novel that comes through. Like the

intellectuals portrayed in the novel, they indulge in gossip and "half-witticisms":

... the blackboards too were clean now, and not of the mysteries of calculus alone but of the pornographic sketches and student half-witticisms. And the boards were free at last of the shrill retail of obscene gossip, with illustrations and unmistakable indentities, figments of student imagination, vengeance for thwarted approaches, general frustration, anger at the existence of women in their midst who set up to be equal, who, outnumbered, must say a hundred nos for every yes and whose great privilege thus became, for the losers, an unforgivable arrogance, and so it was back to the boards and a hundred fictions and lurid diagrams and the wit of diarrhoeic brains...

(page 204)

The impression which we have of the students from this description is that they are would-be black oyinbos, the aspiring black oyinbos. They have the requisite qualification: being mentally crippled in spite of the university education they are receiving ("They fill their heads with knowledge and churn it out but they are not changed in the process ..." - page 216).

5.4 THE PETRIFIED BRAIN MOTIF AS IT RELATES TO THE PORTRAYAL OF JOE GOLDER

One other intellectual in The Interpreters whose lack of imagination is highlighted in the novel is Joe Golder, the American lecturer in African History at the university college in Ibadan. As in the case of the Oguazors, Golder's lack of imagination is indicative of his bad taste which in turn is reflected in the decor in the

sitting-room of his top-floor flat:

The room had such a fastidious air Sagoe could not immediately sit(1). And in spite of a light metal and canvas chair, a Design Centre coffee table, low, with white Formica, in spite of the cubist designs on tiny cushions, Sagoe had stepped into a remote world, ponderous, archaic... (2).

(page 188)

Golder's attempt to be fashionable does not come off; what remains with Sagoe is a sense of the fastidious, of the archaic: the picture, "'Liberace, 'is dated'" (page 188). Furthermore, the only painting in the room displays an astonishing lack of finesse on the part of the artist and also indicts that Golder must have been aesthetically blind to have bought such a painting. It is the dripping motif that is used to describe it..."the tongues which darted from the main gash were wet, dripping. No power or violence but a deliberate viscosity, the trapped dreg of milk pushing through wrinkled film and trickling uncertainly. (page 193).

Because Golder lacks imagination, he cannot, like the Oguazors, think critically. That is why he accepts without question the concept of Negritude; he is a quadroon who feels that he is mentally and spiritually black:

...'You see', he said, 'my body is fully negro; it is simply an act of perverseness that I turn out mostly white.' And then he leapt up suddenly [,] ran round to look at the first brush strokes. 'For God's sake, blacken me. Make me the blackest black blackness in your pantheon.'

(page 217)⁸

⁸The comma in square brackets is missing from Soyinkà's text.

Because Golder is concerned with being mentally black, he is, in the text, the chief apologist for Negritude, a movement which celebrates the "glory" of the African past, the same past the relevance of which the interpreters as "modern" Africans are questioning most vigorously, the same past which Soyinka represents in the novel in terms of "the war of the long canoes" in which, presumably, "fishes over whom hunting rights were fought fed on the disputants" (page 10). This African past, or tradition, is supposed to offer a simple and innocent life-style in which everything is scrupulously ordered and beautiful.

Negritudinists then go on from this premise to glorify the black colour and the black body, hence their over-emphasis on skin colour "as the only decisive common denominator" of the "collective personality of the Negro-African" (Keszthelyi, 1971: 19). In view of this factor, it is not surprising that Golder should stress the attractiveness of the skin colour of the African: "'... I like black people, I really do. Black people are exciting, their colour has such vitality, I mean it is something really beautiful, distinctive...'" (page 195).

In view of the foregoing, Golder wants to be black, not only mentally but in physical terms. He

hated his face and on it he practised one horror after the other(1). Erinle in Kola's Pantheon, Joe Golder turned up in the studio one day with crinkled newspaper stuck raggedly all over his face, reward of afternoons of exposure to the burning sun (2). 'Just what masquerade do you think you are?' Kola, near-hysterical with anger(3).

(pages 101-102)

Although it is Golder's face that is being referred to in this extract, it is actually his skin that is the focus of attention: his face merely happens to be that part of his anatomy which is most visible in its "nakedness". The image which his face presents, then, is of a face covered with tiny flakes of sun-burned skin, which are peeling off or are just about to do so. The flakes of skin have become so dry and white that they look like "crinkled newsprint stuck raggedly all over his face." (2).

The condition of Golder's face makes him assume "an after-sacrifice fiercesness, bits of slaughtered feather sticking to his face" (page 102). This comical description underlines the absurdity of Golder wanting to be physically (and mentally) black: the nominal group slaughtered feather introduces Culture T, satirically, into Golder's life by making his face resemble a sacrificial rock on which chickens have been battered to death.

Negritude, then, is a romantic ideal. As was suggested earlier, the African past which it seeks to glorify was not without its negative aspects, too. Furthermore, the notion of the concept being a romantic ideal is also alluded to by Sagoe in the second extract from his "Book of Enlightenment" reproduced in The Interpreters (pages 96-97). When the two hiking French students whom he had taken to his "arborial" retreat in France "threw Andrew Marvell" in his "teeth" and "hurled refrains of 'a green thought to a green shade'"⁹, Sagoe categorised them as "Voidante pseudo-negritudinists!" (page 97). They could not be true Negritudinists probably because

⁹ The reference here is to Marvell's well-anthologised poem, "The Garden", which questions the notion of virginal nature. See, for instance, Hayward (1978:137-139) for the entire poem.

they were white and did not therefore need to sing the praises of black skin. At the same time (and this is Sagoe's point) their views on nature echo the concerns of Negritude. From this point of view, Sagoe (as well as Soyinka) is attacking the romantic cult of Negritude as held by would-be "progressive" young whites: "Their vision" is one of "virginal nature and arborial voidatory", against which Sagoe's "warnings of the snake menace proved ineffectual" (page 97), as a result of their being too firmly trapped in the inflexibility of their misunderstanding to accommodate any views contrary to their own, even if those other views are valid ones.

By referring to Marvell's poem "The Garden" and, consequently, to the notion of the Garden of Eden, the hiking students are implying the concept of the innocence of "virgin nature". But "innocence" also connotes ignorance brought about as a result of lack of experience; it does not, in this sense, therefore equip one to face the challenges of life. So, it is not all smooth-going in virgin nature. There is also the hidden implication, in the notion of virgin nature, especially as it relates to the Garden of Eden, that the snake is also symbolic of the tempter constituting a threat to the "pure peace" of "virgin nature".

The hilarious tone of Sagoe's answer to the students, then, is meant to show how ridiculous their idea of nature is: snakes are a menace in virgin forests, especially to someone in the vulnerable position of "voidating"!

The point about Negritude, then, is that one should see it for what it really is: an anti-racial racism - "racisme anti-raciste" (Sartre, 1948 : XXIX). In this respect, it is indicative of self-

love¹⁰, as Sagoe points out in the novel: "...the truth is that I get rather sick of self-love. Even nationalism is a kind of self-love but that can be defended. It is this cult of black beauty which sickens me. Are albinos supposed to go and drown themselves, for instance?" (pages 195-196).

As a result of the foregoing, Golder is presented as a very confused man indeed. From this point of view, his wish to be black is a manifestation of his confused state of mind. That is why Egbo thinks of him in terms of images of blackness, and death, as he sings his favourite "negro spiritual" (page 103), "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child", at his Vacation Concert:

...The blackness swallowed Joe Golder now before his eyes, and Egbo heard the shriek of the child's terror once again and the blackened hands that flailed desperately for hands to touch his and lips to meet his and clean waters to lave him and the waters did. Indigo fountains rose and swirled his feet. Joe Golder seeking blackness ever, walked in the backyards of old women through criss-crosses of bamboos so low it seemed a place for hanging dwarfs, and he went crouched and hump-backed through crossing jet-stained bamboos chipped and knotted, hung on wooden crocks, and the dye-cloths dripped unwrung...

(page 246)

¹⁰ "Self-love" in this context also implies selfishness and, therefore, insincerity on the part of the black intellectual elite in Africa and elsewhere who preached Negritude, in that the rights and emancipation which they claimed were meant for themselves only, without regard for the interests of the masses of Africans and the Carribbean people. Their invocation of the racial brotherhood of all black people is therefore a deceit. (See Keszthelyi, 1971:17).

This passage, as well as the longer one from which it has been taken, is reminiscent of the corrupt rain-and-beer-froth puddle that Egbo claims to be conversing with in the very first scene in the text (pages 7-8). It is also reminiscent of many truly radical images in Egbo's mind: drowning (or nearly doing so) at Osa and seeing another child fall into an indigo dye-vat are closely connected with the divisions in his own soul. At the same time, however, it also depicts Golder's confusion and disorientation. For instance, his tendency toward self-pity is indicative of a deep crisis of identity which is raging within him, and this crisis concerns the issue of who exactly he is. He defiantly rejects the ambiguous racial position in which his father, who is "half-negro" but who looks "completely white" (page 188) has put him, driving him to commit suicide in the process ("'....I drove him to it. I was so ashamed of him and I did not hide it. I spat on my flesh to his face because it came from him ... '" - page 188).

But driving his father to suicide did not change Golder's racially ambiguous situation, which continues to haunt him throughout the novel. His answer to the problem is to withdraw into himself and whine away in self-pity, with his homosexuality ("'You see... I like men'" - page 200) compounding his dilemma even further. The result of all this is that he has become even more phoney than the people he regards as phoney, which is anyone but himself: "'... I don't care for people and I don't want them to care for me. Most of them are phonies anyway.. ..'" (page 190).

The reality of Golder's life, then, is that he is desperately trying to have hands touch his own wildly flailing arms so that he

might have some assurance in life, thereby acquiring the confidence with which to go through life. That is why he weeps "out his life" (page 215) to Kola and why he intrudes on the "spell" of "the octopoid lethargy of the night" with "his drum of tribulations" as he and Sagoe walk to his flat in the early hours of the morning (page 187). From this point of view, Sagoe, and Kola especially, perform for Golder the role which Bandele performs for Ayo Faseyi: that of a listener (a reluctant listener in the cases of Sagoe and Kola)to complaints.

5.5. CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing, the intellectuals depicted in The Interpreters are as irresponsible as the politicians and the Board members, whose portrayal in the text I discussed in Chapter Four. It is for this reason that the society of the novel is characterised by futility it is also the reason why the interpreters have to look elsewhere for solutions to the problems which continually plague them in the text. The way in which they try to cope with those problems and the difficulties which they face are discussed in some detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

THE STYLISTIC REALISATION OF THE INTERPRETERS' SEARCH FOR CERTAINTY AND OF THEIR DILEMMA

6.1 GENERAL

As a result of the irresponsibility and the unrealistic attitudes of the Board members and the politicians (which were discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 above) on the one hand, and those of the intellectuals (Chapter 5) on the other, the fictional world depicted in The Interpreters is characterised by a sense of futility. Because they are leading meaningless, wasteful lives, the characters referred to above are operating on the creek-surface. This much is made clear by Egbo when he tells Bandele that by teaching (Economics) at the university college in Ibadan, he (Bandele) is "Lending pith to hollow reeds" (page 13).

6.2 THE CREEK-SURFACE EXISTENCE OF THE INTERPRETERS

But it is not only the satirised characters in the text who are operating on the creek-surface; the interpreters themselves are, too, in the sense that they have not been able to bring about a meaningful fusion of elements of Cultures T and W. It is again Egbo, who emerges in the text as the interpreter that has thought most deeply about the relationship between the two Cultures, that makes this point: "... Don't you ever feel that your whole life might be sheer creek-surface bearing the burdens of fools, a mere passage, a mere reflecting medium or occasional sheer mass controlled by ferments beyond you?" (page 13).

Furthermore, operating on the creek-surface is equivalent to going with the tide. Again, it is Egbo who develops this last metaphor in the text. One of the two paddlers who take Bandele, Kola, Egbo and Sheikh to Osa, at the beginning of the text, at one time during the trip offers the information that the tide "changes direction by late afternoon" (page 13), thereby suggesting that the friends should make up their minds as to whether they want to go ashore or not. A little while later, the same canoeman (presumably) "pointed at the water" to reinforce his point (page 14). In physical terms, therefore, one has to go with the tide and not against it if one is to have a smooth passage on water. It is this literal meaning of going with the tide that Egbo develops into a metaphor ("All right, let's go." "With the tide" - page 14) to make the point that he will have to continue on the creek-surface (even though he wants to escape from it - page 13) since neither tradition nor the Western Culture offers any acceptable solutions with respect to his attempt to find a sense of certainty and of depth in his life: "...What choice, I ask myself, is there between the ugly mudskippers on this creek and the raucous toads of our sewage-ridden ports? What difference?" (page 14).

From the point of view of the dilemma of the interpreters, the term creek-surface also reminds one of the expression "to be up the creek" (a short formula of the coarse slang phrase, probably beginning in the Armed Forces of 1939-45: to "be up shit creek without a paddle"), which means to be in an utterly hopeless situation which one is not equipped to deal with. The expression is thus relevant to the lack-of-depth situation of the interpreters and, consequently, to their superficially drifting with the tide: they are powerless to stop

themselves going through life in a superficial manner. Furthermore, the word creek itself has connotations of some obscure winding, back-water whose destination is not clear.

In addition to the foregoing, Kola develops the collocational potential (Kress, 1976:80) of creek-surface in The Interpreters by using the lexical item apostasy as a synonym for it:

'Is that why power attracts you?' (1) Bandle asked (2).

'I merely want to be released from the creek-surface' (3)

'From apostasy' (4). Kola said (5).

'What's that?' (6)

'What?' (7) Oh you mean apostate? (8) An apostate, that's a face I cannot draw, even badly (9). You know, an absolute neutrality' (10).

(page 13)

It is clear from this extract that Kola uses apostasy to collocate with face, especially a face characterised by "absolute neutrality" (10). This "absolute neutrality" is manifested on the face by a negative type of smoothness. From this point of view, the notion of apostasy is most directly used in the description of "Noah", especially the description of his face. Immediately after the service in Lazarus's Church, which the interpreters as well as Dehinwa and Lasunwon attend at the prophet's invitation, Egbo expresses his cynicism at "Noah's" alleged spiritual transformation thus, "'I do not like apostasy....He has the smooth brass face of an apostate'" (page 177).

The issue of the smoothness of "Noah's" face is iterated later by Kola when he explains to Monica why he has not represented the failed candidate for Apostleship as Esumare in the Pantheon: "... Noah was simply negative. The innocence on his face was unrelieved

vacuity - he had nothing, absolutely nothing....'" (page 227).

Thus, creek-surface is not only synonymous with apostasy; it is also synonymous with vacuity. As a result of "Noah's" apostasy, then, he lacks "an inner radiance" (page 177), an inner fire. This is the reason why he fails the ordeal by fire by which means Lazarus has hoped to initiate him as an Apostle in his Church in place of the late Brother Ezra (pages 223-224). And the next time Egbo sees "Noah" on the campus of the university college in Ibadan, "... the experience of the passage of fire had been washed off him or had simply never been. Noah was cleansed of every moment of his past except this new instant of mango raiding" (page 231).

It is as if "Noah" is neutral with regard to the effects of the coming together of both Cultures T and W. This explains why he is represented as a "faceless creature" in the Pantheon (page 227). As a result of his lack of inner fire, "Noah" is "dead, devitalised, with no character of any sort, a blank white sheet for accidental scribbles." (page 231). It is for this reason that he has not been given any "real" name in the text; rather, the two names by which he is known in the novel, "Barabbas" and "Noah" are given to him by Sagoe (Chapter 8) and Lazarus (Chapter 12) respectively to describe their impressions of him or the light in which they see him. Thus, although he has two names in the novel the young thief essentially has no name.

There are two ways, then, in which the interpreters can be apostates: (a) by disowning the principles and values of Culture T, and (b) by disowning those of Culture W. "Noah" is an apostate precisely because he is neutral with regard to the principles and values of the two Cultures: he is the type of person that is neutral as to the con-

conflict going on in his society between elements of both Cultures ("...Noah's apostasy... is simply the refusal to be, the refusal to be a living thing, like a moon'" - page 231). He is pure nothing, mere potentiality incapable of becoming an act. He is totally without personal identity, a human chameleon who becomes whatever (safe) environment he is put in and adopts whatever role that environment thrusts upon him.- except that of initiate by fire-ordeal and the attempt to walk on water (pages 223-224).

In view of the foregoing, Egbo and Kola do not like apostasy: it is a type of living death. For to be truly alive, one has not only to be aware of the demands of both Cultures T and W but also to be able to balance them against each other.

From this point of view, the Oguazors, too, are apostates in the sense that they are, by pretending to be mentally white, turning their backs on the demands of the traditional Culture. They feel that they have become civilised people by behaving like black oyinbos ("... We are all civilised creatures here'" - page 143). In view of this factor, the Oguazors are the type of people who would regard, in an indiscriminate manner, the traditional Culture as backward and out of date.

It is not that the Oguazors have simply discarded all aspects of the traditional Culture as such, however; rather, they have embraced one aspect of it which they feel would enhance their social and academic standing in their community - namely, unquestioning respect for older people. Thus, at the buffet supper which they give to celebrate Oguazor's appointment to a professorship, Nnojekwe, possibly a lecturer in the university college in Ibadan, goes up to the Professor and asks him "for fatherly advice on when he should take his annual leave..." (page 147).

It is not usual for someone to ask a professional colleague "for fatherly advice" on when to proceed on annual leave. But as far as Oguazor is concerned, it has to be fatherly advice, for this is one way to fawn on him. Pinkshore has given us an indication of how much people such as Oguazor like to be flattered: "...if the asses [the "new black élite"] are susceptible to fawning and flattery let's give it them and get what we can out of them while the going is good" (page 149).

Similarly, when during the interval at Golder's Vacation Concert Bandele goes to join a group which includes Oguazor, the professor yields "some paternal room for him in the crowded circle" (page 250). The father-figure motif is also used in connection with the Oguazors in the first of the two passages in which undergraduates are satirised in the text: "...always in the good cause, the Oguazors suffered a few nice boys to soil their cushion covers with their presence, hoping that tea and sandwiches might transfer some gentility to a redeemed few..." (pages 203-204). The word suffered has a Biblical echo to it ("Suffer the little children to come unto me..." (Mark 10.14. Cf. Matt. 19.14 and Luke 18.16). Oguazor clearly identifies himself with "the Father" in the theological sense of the word: he thinks that this approach would make the students into "gentlemen" but it does not ("But the guests returned to their mimeographs to throw one more muddled assault on staff inviolability..." - page 204).

Furthermore, it is not only the Oguazors who exploit the traditional code concerning respect for one's elders: the Managing Director, too, and, by implication, the other members of the Board of the "Independent Viewpoint" do so ("...We want the kind of person who is going to respect his superior not conceited boys of your type..." - page 79).

In addition, it is also in order to boost his ego that the Managing Director goes on his many trips abroad in flowing traditional robes. On at least one occasion in the text, Soyinka uses these robes to underline how stupid and vulgar the odious Board member is. He has just failed to get the German salesgirl, who has just sold him the "apoplectic radiogram" which is later used to decorate the board-room of the "Independent Viewpoint" building, to go to bed with him ("By the way...do come to my hotel and show me how it works" - page 75). But the "sales fraulein" does not take the bait and the thwarted Board member leaves in disarray, "Dragging his long trail of traditional splendour after him...." (page 75).

In view of the foregoing, then, Egbo's wish to be released from the creek-surface (page 13) is also indicative of his anxiety about not becoming an apostate: he, as well as the other interpreters, has to find a way of bringing elements of Cultures T and W together in a meaningful relationship.

6.3 THE INTERPRETERS' ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE FROM THE CREEK-SURFACE

Since it is through Egbo's consciousness that the interpreters' attempts to find a sense of certainty in the chaos all around them is most consistently and most clearly depicted in The Interpreters, the discussion in the following sections is undertaken mainly from his point of view.

As was stated in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Lazarus's claimed experience of resurrection is symbolic of the interpreters' search for certainty, as well as of their dilemma. The prophet's experience is, in turn, symbolically represented by Kola in his monumental

Pantheon of Yoruba gods ("The Pantheon is weight..." - page 228).

Lazarus is depicted in the pantheon as
 an arched figure rising not from a dry grave, but
 from a primordial chaos of gaseous whorls and flood-
 waters (1). He is wreathed in nothing but light,
 a pure rainbow translucence....(2)

(page 232)

It is not clear why there is a change of verb tense in (2): from the past simple was (immediately preceding this extract) to the simple present is in (2). The important point that emerges from this extract, however, is that Lazarus is rising from a state of confusion to a higher plane of thought(1). Again recurring here is the "primordial chaos" motif which we also notice in connection with the painting of the Pantheon itself (page 224). And again, "primordial chaos" is linked with (the) flood-waters (of the beginning) to reinforce the notion of pre-creation chaos. In this respect, therefore, Lazarus is making the effort to raise himself from a state of confusion, of mental chaos, by reaching for the quality of clarity of thought.

Thus, the prophet's claim of having once risen from death acquires symbolic value in the novel and too much importance should not therefore be attached to the literal aspects of that claim. The interpreters recognise this fact. For instance, although they find it difficult to accept Lazarus's claim of having died and risen from the dead (page 162), it still intrigues them all the same, and they seek to extract from the albino's face "the essence of the man's experience" (page 161). This essence of his experience is not going to be found in the claim of resurrection itself but in Lazarus himself, that is, in whatever it is

that lies behind his making that claim. That something, it turns out from the way he has been depicted in the Pantheon, is his desire to endow his life with some meaning, his wish to rise from bare existence to a richer life.

From this point of view, the portrayal of the prophet in the Pantheon takes the form of a revelation: "He is wreathed in nothing but light..." (2), which suggests that he has been living in darkness but has now seen the light. There is a Biblical echo to this picture of Lazarus:

And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud; and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire.

(Revelation 10.1).

Furthermore, the fact that Lazarus has grown out of darkness into light is symbolically portrayed in the Church episode through the "story" of his resurrection: after his surrealist ordeal with the old man with his mouth "stuffed with cotton wool" and who is therefore without a tongue or teeth (page 168), he emerges into sunlight:

His [Lazarus's] eyes scraped the walls like a blind beetle and came to rest staring straight through the open door into sunlight....

'... yes, it was just like that, as I face this door, so did I look up suddenly and see that gate open before my eyes ...'

(pages 169-170)

Lazarus's awareness of the need to uplift the quality of his life is thus presented in the form of a revelation with a Christian

aspect to it. Egbo, too, has earlier sought this revelation, as a boy, in "the light of Simi's skin" (page 126). From this point of view, the use of the word rising in the earlier extract about Lazarus's portrayal in the Pantheon becomes significant: he is trying to rise above a muddled view of life into a clearer view, and he hopes by this means to raise the quality of his life. This line of interpretation is reinforced by the use of "rise" to describe Egbo's initiation, through his first sexual experience with Simi, into manhood and, therefore, into "the gods' domain" (page 126): "No single man had the right to feel what he felt, to command rebellions of the ordered cosmos in the withering of his boastful rise amidst talcumed brambles....(page 123).

The phrase "talcumed brambles" refers to Simi's powdered thighs, which have earlier been described in terms of "tall reeds" in the last part of Chapter 4 (page 60). Furthermore, Egbo sees himself here (most probably without his knowing it) as embodying the qualities of Esu, the spirit of disorder, who is "eternally mocking the pretensions of the bowl of plan and mocking lines of order in the ring of chaos" (page 225): He (Egbo) is, by sleeping with Simi, rebelling against the pretensions to lofty moral virtues by the people in his society. In a more immediate context, he sees himself as rebelling against the code of morality by which his friend Dejiade runs his life ("Dejiade's room held the terrors of a sinful life in framed texts round the wall..." page 53). And although Egbo is at the time in question still a boy - he has just left school - his designation of the place under the bridge at Olokemeji, which is an aftermath of his sexual initiation by Simi, as a retreat (page 127) continues to have significance for him as an adult ("...I come here, shall I say, to

be vindicated again, and again and again....'" - page 133)¹.

6.3.1 THE CREATION MOTIF

In addition to the foregoing, Lazarus's attempt to rise onto a higher plane of thought is a resurrection, in symbolic terms. It is a statement by Egbo which points to the plausibility of this line of interpretation. In that statement, he rejects the way in which Kola has represented Lazarus in the Pantheon - as a link between heaven and earth:

'I cannot accept this view of life (1). He has made the beginning itself a resurrection (2). This is an optimist's delusion of continuity.'(3)

(page 223).

It is the second sentence in this extract that is of direct relevance to the discussion in hand. Although Egbo rejects this symbolic view of resurrection as artistically expressed by Kola, the reader accepts it because it is consistent with the main themes of the text. The fact of Lazarus rising from chaos is seen as a resurrection because it indicates an attempt on his part to leave a hitherto lethargic state of mind for a more purposeful mental condition. This is what the interpreters, too, are trying to do.

The fact that "flood-waters" play a major role in the way Lazarus has been portrayed in the Pantheon reinforces a thematic function of the floods motif in the text which I touched on in Chapter 2 ∴ that

⁴ There are many more occurrences of the lexical item rise and its grammatical variants in The Interpreters, but the two occurrences discussed here seem to be the most important from the point of view of the main themes of the novel.

of underlining the confusion of two of the interpreters - Kola and Egbo - and, by implication that of Bandele, Sagoe and Sheikh as well. In the case of the portrayal of Lazarus in the Pantheon, however, that confusion is clearly presented as pre-creation chaos: it is in order to find his way out of this chaos that Lazarus is trying to reach for a higher plane of thought.

In addition, the use of the floods motif to indicate pre-creation chaos is also manifested in more general terms in the portrayal of the interpreters in the Pantheon:

And of these floods of the beginning, of the fevered
fogs of the beginning, of the first messenger, the
thimble of earth, a fowl and an ear of corn, seeking
the spot where a scratch would become a peopled island,...

(page 224)

This extract, as well as the entire passage from which it has been taken in the novel (pages 224-225), demonstrates the ultimate example of Soyinka's elliptical style in The Interpreters.² It is made up

² One main characteristic of Soyinka's elliptical style in The Interpreters is that certain sentences or even paragraphs lack a main verb ("Sekoni, obscuring himself in the street of Ibadan, plodding among the easels in Kola's art classes, moving around without a sense of intrusion, without comment, waiting for a decision to be taken on his fate by the next meeting of the governing board ..." - page 28; "Behind him, a buzz of approval" - page 91; "Through stamping, leaping feet and a thunderous ferment of handclaps, Noah washing feet that won't keep still...Lazarus weaving back and forth" - page 174). This factor is indicative of the fact ^{that} The Interpreters was written by a poet (See Jones, 1978:4).

But there are also examples in the text of Soyinka's tendency to be economical in his presentation of dialogue or conversation. For instance, there are those utterances which do not contain explicit mention of a speaker's name or of a verb of saying, or of any comment whatever, either preceding or coming after them:

'And yet from among them...sometimes it is incredible.'

'What is it?'

'I was just thinking that from among them - these students

'I mean - one finds the future genius.'

'Don't talk so conceitedly old.'

'Well, aren't I?' (p. 204)

This example shows that The Interpreters was also written by a playwright. (See also my concluding remarks about the whole thesis below.)

of a string of prepositional groups in which of, the preposition, is usually followed by a nominal group some of which are very complex indeed. For instance, as a result of the elliptical nature of the passage in question, it does not contain a main verb. This factor brings about an ambiguous situation. For instance, it is impossible to say at first sight what the syntactic status of the prepositions in question is.

A suggestion that emerges from the immediate environment in which the passage in question occurs is that the linguistic clue to the interpretation of the passage is to be found in Kola's utterance which immediately follows it: "Kola said, 'It requires only the bridge, or the ladder between heaven and earth. A rope or a chain. The link, that is all. After fifteen months, all that is left is the link...'" (page 225). The pronominal item It here refers to the painting, or the Pantheon, in front of which Kola and, presumably, Egbo and Simi are standing as the thoughts expressed in the passage go through the artist's mind. From this point of view, the passage would have read something like the following:

S

/// ...^mThe {ⁿpainting
picture} of these floods of the beginning, of the
fevered fogs of the beginning, of the first messenger.....]

P

C

requires | only the bridge, or the ladder [between heaven
and earth.] ///

From another point of view, however, the prepositional groups in question could also be forms of complementation to verbs such as speak, talk, think, write, sing ("speak of", "talk of", "think of", "write of", "sing of" and so on) where of means about. This observation has thematic implications for the story told in The Interpreters as a whole; for it implies a syntactic parallel with the first six lines of Milton's

Paradise Lost, an epic poem which describes and interprets the Bible story of creation, especially as recorded in Genesis, 2 onwards, with the emphasis on the fall of Man:

A
 ||| OF [Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit 1
 [Of that Forbidd'n Tree, [whose mortal tast¹
 Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
 With loss [of Eden], || till one greater Man²
 3
 Restore us, || and regain the blissful Seat, ||] 5
 p svoc
 Sing | Heav'nly Muse, ... |||

(See Darbishire, 1958:5)

In this example, the syntactic status of the prepositional groups is clear: they occur at Adjunct position in the clause; of is therefore synonymous with about. Furthermore, there are certain parallels, in content, between Soyinka's passage and Milton's lines, especially lines 6-10:

...Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top 6
 Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
 That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
 In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
 Rose out of Chaos:... 10

(Darbishire, 1958:5)

The references to "That Shepherd" and "the chosen seed" (line 8) correspond roughly to "the first messenger" and "a fowl and an ear of corn" respectively in Soyinka's text. Also, Chaos in Milton parallels "these floods" and the "fevered fogs of the beginning in Soyinka (page 224).

Furthermore, a correspondence can be seen in the whole idea of creation, of the "Heav'ns and Earth" rising "out of Chaos" in Milton (lines 9-10) and the establishment of "a peopled island" (page 224), "the parting of the fog and the retreat of the beginning" (page 225) in Soyinka. This creation motif performs an important thematic function in The Interpreters.

For instance, the conjunctive opening of the passage in question is meant, presumably, to effect a link between the idea of floods in the preceding episode which describes the floods, in Chapter 15 of the text, in which Egbo and Kola get lost for a while and which also form the background setting for Lazarus's failure to initiate "Noah" as an Apostle in his Church. This link has the effect of reinforcing the theme of confusion in the text.

From this point of view, Kola's painting of the Pantheon is symbolic of the Creator creating order out of chaos. This, essentially is what the interpreters are trying to do in The Interpreters. In this connection, Kola could be regarded as the master interpreter in the text: he is trying to interpret his friends' experiences, as well as his own, through the medium of art.

In view of the foregoing, pre-creation chaos as represented in the Pantheon takes the form of floods and of fogs, from which order is going to, or has to, be created. This factor is consistent with the use of floods, which I have hinted at earlier (see Chapter 2 above), to symbolically realise the confusion of the interpreters. In addition, the confusion and the feeling of uncertainty which the floods have brought ^{about} in Egbo and Kola ("...it seemed possible to miss a foothold, to misjudge the ground and disappear forever in some hidden bog" - page 221) are compounded by the darkness, which has just come on:

... Egbo looked around, but the church was nowhere near.⁽¹⁾ It was already dark but he realised now that he could not be far from the church and he balanced dangerously on the tree and squinted into the distance.⁽²⁾

He could not be certain, but it seemed he could discern the outlines of the church against the evening grey⁽³⁾. Egbo went forward, darkness overtaking him completely.⁽⁴⁾

(page 222).

Although Egbo has a vague feeling that he "could not be far from the church", he still does not know exactly where he is ⁽²⁾. This sense of uncertainty persists into ⁽³⁾ and when he moves forward, it is into the "embrace" of darkness that he moves, thus deepening his confusion and uncertainty. As has been suggested in Chapter 3, the episode in question is symbolic of the confusion and frustration of the interpreters in the novel.

The darkness motif, is, in fact, used in other parts of The Interpreters to indicate confusion, especially on Egbo's part. It is used in this connection, for instance, to characterise his confusion, in Past B, under the bridge at Olokemeji (a location which is later to become his "retreat", "a place of pilgrimage" - page 127) after the night of pleasure and terror which he spends in Simi's bed:

In the middle of the night he woke and could not tell where he was. In the middle of the night, groping around in nowhere, no stars, no glow worms that he could see, the other bank had held the course of rushing bright waters now they were turned black, black as the deep-sunk cauldrons of women dyers and the indigo streams from adire "dyed cloth"³ hung up to dry....

(page 126)

³ "Glossary" in The Interpreters, p. 259.

Egbo longs for the "light of Simi's skin" (page 126) to pierce the darkness, since it is she who has introduced him into manhood and into the domain of the gods by taking his "orphan virginity" (page 122).

Similarly, after Egbo has learnt from Bandele of the anonymous girl student's pregnancy but not of her name or whereabouts, and as his frustration deepens (he is torn between choosing either Simi or the girl student), it is into the darkness that he walks (page 243). He does not leave this atmosphere of darkness, figuratively speaking, till the story of the novel ends, in that it is the deepening of his frustration, and anger at being frustrated - as well as the frustration of Kola and Sagoe and the frustration and anger of Bandele - that stands out prominently at the end of the text. Thus, the fact that it is in terms of blackness that Egbo thinks of Golder at the latter's Vacation Concert ("...The blackness swallowed Joe Golder now before his eyes..."; "Joe Golder seeking blackness ever...." page 246) is also a further reflection of his own "desperate" situation, that is, his inability to choose between Simi and the girl student.

So, the darkness motif is used in The Interpreters to deepen the sense of confusion in the interpreters and (as we saw earlier) to underline Egbo's concern and, by extension, that of the other interpreters, with pinning down the elusive and mysterious.

In view of the fact that the floods motif is used in The Interpreters to reinforce the notion of pre-creation chaos, the view put forward by Gakwandi (1977:84) that it implies the impending destruction of the society of the novel cannot really be defended. For instance, he asserts that the portrayal of Lazarus in the Pantheon "in the colours of the rainbow" represents

God's covenant with Noah: that the world would never be destroyed by water again. The rainbow form of the bridge thus suggests the threat of destruction through fire.

He then links this rainbow motif with James Baldwin's essay The Fire Next Time (1963) which ends with the words of a Negro Spiritual:

"God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!"

(page 120). All this is fine but not relevant to The Interpreters, for it is difficult to find justification for it in the text, in which it is perfectly clear that the floods motif is used to underline the chaos which so basically characterises the society of the novel, rather than the impending destruction of that society. In addition, the rainbow motif is meant to reinforce the notion of light, in terms of which the prophet is represented in the painting.

The line of interpretation pursued by Gakwandi is based on the premise that The Interpreters is simply a social satire: he (Gakwandi, 1977:66) sees the novel as an attempt to examine and interpret the "problems and dilemmas of the new political order in Africa". This point of departure leads him, not unexpectedly, a) to connect the interpreters' search for stability and certainty in their lives with a wish on their part to change the existing social and political order and, therefore, with the issue of political power (Ibid., pages 67 and 85); and b) ultimately to the idea of a politically-motivated revolution "in which the down-trodden members of the society will rise against their incompetent masters" (Ibid., page 84. See also Ogungbesan (1979:3-4)). But we know from the novel that Soyinka does not emphasise the political factor; rather, it is the quality of people's minds

that he is primarily concerned with. And, in any case, it is not the type of ordinary people (the masses) depicted in the novel that one would expect to plan and execute a political revolution, for all they are concerned about is enriching themselves just as the Managing Director, and others, have done; they therefore fawn on them: "...run, Barabbas from the same crowd which will reform tomorrow and cheer the larger thief returning from his twentieth Economic Mission and pluck his train from the mud, dog-wise, in their teeth" (page 114).

Similarly, Eustace Palmer (1979:241) describes The Interpreters as "probably the most comprehensive exposé of the decadence of modern African society that has so far been published", and examines it as such. But, as we have seen, the concerns which emerge from the novel are much wider than those relating to social satire; and it is therefore neither beneficial to the reader or critic nor fair to the author to pretend that this is not the case.

The point made, about five pages earlier, about Kola's painting of the Pantheon being symbolic of the interpreters' attempts to create some order in their lives is also an example of the way in which the friends try to create myths of their own as a way of evolving that sense of order. They try to do this because they lack any other positive direction due to the general atmosphere of disorientation and confusion that so basically pervades their society. The issue of the friends creating myths of their own is alluded to by Bandele in the Lazarus Church scene when he cautions his friends, "'...When you create your own myth don't carelessly promote another's, and perhaps a more harmful one'" (page 178.).

In creating his own myth, Kola extends the Yoruba traditional myths of the supernatural in general and of creation in particular by substituting his friends for gods in the Pantheon ("...the whole point is that you are substituting..." - page 226). He seeks to capture the essence of his friends', and his own, experiences: they are (like Lazarus) in trying to reach a higher level of understanding, reaching towards heaven, seeking admittance into the "gods' domain" (page 126).

Because Kola's "myth" is based on Yoruba mythology, it is public; but it is also private in so far as he tries to extend aspects of that mythology. Similarly, Egbo's own "myth" is both public and personal: his establishment of a "retreat" under the bridge at Olokemeji (page 127) is attachable to Yoruba mythology ("The bridge spanned the Ogun River where the boulders appeared like those rugged Egba ancients in conclave. They were far-flung toes of the unyielding god, Olumo black of Egba...." page 125). At the same time, however, the making of the place in question as a "retreat" is a personal issue for Egbo, an issue which is immediately traceable to his introduction, by Simi, to manhood through his first ever pleasure-and-pain experience of sexual intercourse ("For exquisite though it was, it meant pain...." -page 60). In view of the foregoing, Kola and Egbo are trying to describe their view of reality in terms of traditional myths.

However, the "myths" which Sheikh and Sagoe try to develop are of a more personal nature than those of Kola and Egbo. Sheikh, for instance, has one comic myth: his "cobbles" ("Sekoni fought the cobbles valiantly but lost, shook his head in pitying disapproval - page 19); and one serious, religious one:

"domes"⁴ ("T-t-to make such d-d-distinctions [between the dead and the living] disrupts the d-d-dome of c-c-continuity, which is w w what life is" - page 9). This statement is of great thematic significance in The Interpreters, as we shall soon see. Domes also recalls mosques; so Sheikh's coming from a Moslem family could have influenced his "myth".

But by far the more elaborate attempt to create a personal myth in the text is made by Sagoe: he makes frequent references to what he describes as his "drink lobes", which is a curious nominal group of the ch type, where c is classifier and h head:

c h
drink lobes

In all, there are twelve references to Sagoe's "drink lobes" in The Interpreters, as the following examples show:

- (1) 'Metal on concrete jars my drink lobes.'
(page 7.)
- (2) 'You are jarring my drink lobes.'
(page 34)
- (3) She [Dehinwa] drove home furiously while he kept mumbling, 'You should watch my drink lobes. You keep jarring them.'
(page 34)
- (4) 'Of course. Seriously, though, something has happened to my drink lobes...' (page 35)

⁴ Incidentally, the metaphor of life as a dome has earlier been used by P.B. Shelley in his elegy on the death of John Keats, "Adonais":

Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
Until Death tramples it to fragments.

(See Hayward (1978:289))

- (5) '....You know where the drink lobes are,
don't you?'

(page 35)⁵

- (6) And up on the second floor he felt the
revving of the motor engine deep inside
his irritated lobes.

(page 63)

- (7)the Morgue began to laugh, a curious
cavernous laugh that somehow was soothing
to Sagoe's raw drink lobes.

(page 65)

- (8) '...You slam the bed against the wall, you
wait until my head is in the doorway and then
you shut the damned door, you walk all over my
drink lobes with your wooden clogs ... '

(pages 66-7)

- (9) '...How can I get clean if I crouch. I need
a strong down beat of water on my head, beating my
drink lobes back into place.... '

(pages 104-5)

- (10) ...It was in fact only with a supreme effort
of recollection which tore his drink lobes across the
ligaments that he was able to think of her [Monica
Fasey] consciously as a white girl....

(page 184)

- (11) Sagoe found himself muttering, 'Oh, just take off.'

⁵ Although the utterances in examples (4) and (5) occur within the same text of discourse, they have been separated here for ease of reference and the purpose of discussion.

Your face is antipathetic to the state
of my drink lobes.'

(page 184)

- (12) '...But even so...I surpassed myself...the drink
must have congealed my lobes, I think.'

(page 200)

There are three general observations that I wish to make concerning the twelve examples set out above. First, the nominal group drink lobes occurs in nine out of the twelve examples in utterances by Sagoe, and in the remaining three others ((6),(7) and (10)) in passages of indirect reporting of Sagoe's thoughts by the narrator. Second, in the nine examples where drinklobes occurs in utterances by Sagoe, Dehinwa is the addressee in (1 - 5) and (7) and (8) respectively, while Joe Golder is the audience in (11) and (12). Third, it is only in example (6) that the classifier drink does not co-occur with lobes.

More specific, however, is the question of the exact nature of the referent of "drink lobes". The first thing that strikes the attentive reader about this nominal compound is its novelty. Its occurrence as the opening statement of the novel (example (1)) helps to enhance this novel quality, in the sense that the reader is forced to pay particular attention to it. The novelty of "drink lobes" consists in the unusual collocation of drink and lobes. The lexical item lobes normally collocates with ear - as in ear-lobes - and with brain (as in brain-lobes). In addition, lobes also tends to co-occur with lung(s) and liver, and also with leaf from the botanical point of view. However, it is clear from examples (8) and (9) that Sagoe's "drink lobes" are located in the head; and they are jarred by harsh

noises (examples (1) and (6)), bumpy car trips (examples (2) and (3)), beds pushed into the wall, door-slammings and noisy footfalls (example (8)) and certain types of white face (example (11)). Laughter of a certain kind can "soothe" them when they are "raw" (example (7)), and drink itself can cause them to "congeal", while mental effort - when they are in the process of "congealing" can damage their ligaments (example (10)). Also, they can seem to become "displaced" (example (9)). The basic explanation of the nature of this organ occurs in the elaboration, in The Interpreters of example (5):

- (5) (a) 'Everyone is born with them, but you have to find them you see.(1)You get to know them when you become professional.(2)Then it gives a delicate trill and you know you're there.(3) The first time, it is like confirmation... a truly religious moment.'(4)

(page 35)

There are three important issues that arise from this utterance. The first of these issues has to do with the use of the third person singular neuter pronoun it in the third sentence. In the preceding sentence, and also in the first, the third person plural pronoun them has been used to refer anaphorically to "drink lobes" which has occurred earlier - in example (5) in fact. One therefore expects that them would have been repeated in the third sentence. This view is reinforced by the occurrence of professional earlier on; since it is only when the "drink lobes" are activated by drink that one feels the sensation of being "there". But the meaning of "professional" itself is not clear in the context in which it appears. Does it refer

to a professional drinker? or a professional journalist? Or is being a professional drinker synonymous with being a professional journalist and vice versa? Or is it just a member of any profession that is meant? One can only deduce from the text in which "professional" occurs that Sagoe is referring to the addicted drinker, the dedicated drunk. In other words, one must, in order to be able to find the "drink lobes", at least take drink seriously. This latter point touches on the third important issue which arises from the utterance quoted overleaf, and which has to do with the seriousness with which Sagoe takes drink. It is as important to him as one's profession is important to one, and this is the reason why he equates the moment of the discovery of the "drink lobes" as a religious experience - it is like the first-hand experience of confirmation in Church. The religious tone of the statement in question is enhanced further still by the lexical item trill. The picture of an ecstatic religious moment evoked by Sagoe's description recalls the scene in Lazarus's Church in which the Apostles and the predominantly female congregation receive "Noah" into the fold amidst singing and clapping and dancing (pages 174-176 of text).

The fact that Sagoe takes drink and his "drink lobes" very seriously is also reinforced by his, and the narrator's preceding of the nominal group drink lobes by a possessive item. In the twelve examples set out above, that nominal group is preceded by the pronoun my ("my drink lobes") on seven occasions (examples (1), (2), (3), (4), (8), (9) and (11)); it is also preceded by his ("his drink lobes") once (example (10)); and by Sagoe's ("Sagoe's raw drink lobes") also once (example (7)). In addition, my directly modifies lobes ("my lobes")

once (example (12)); and his also precedes "irritated lobes" ("his irritated lobes") once (example (6)). All these occurrences of "drink lobes" and "lobes" respectively firmly root the concept referred to on the level of the subjective, like the Voidancy "philosophy" (pages 71-72 of text). But then, there is the attempt on Sagoe's part to give that concept the quality of objectivity by his modifying drink lobes with the generic deitic the in "the drink lobes" in example (5). The universal note sounded in this example is emphasised by the explanation that follows it, which is reproduced in example (5)(a). Thus, Sagoe is trying to invest the "drink lobes" with universality by claiming that they are essentially a part of the physical anatomy of human beings. The seriousness with which Sagoe views these organs is reflected in the way he talks about them to Dehinwa and later in Golder's presence (see pages 168-9).

In one sense, then, drink (or rather indulgence in drinking) is a positive thing in that it makes it possible for one to discover something important about oneself. In this connection, drink it is that brings about the truly religious moment referred to in example (5) (a); this is a positive situation. On the other hand, however, excessive drinking produces severe alcohol-induced headache in the form of a hangover and this is a really unpleasant experience, as Sagoe himself finds out from time to time in the course of the story. This, then, is the negative aspect of the "religious" experience which one acquires as a result of discovering the presence of the "drink lobes". Still on this negative aspect, drink tends, over a long period of time, to render the "drink lobes" ineffectual by congealing them (see example (12)); thus

drying them up and making them go solid. This view implies that the "drink lobes" themselves secrete some sort of liquid or semi-liquid fluid. When they do harden, therefore, they interfere with Sagoe's "sixth sense", his imagination and his intuitions (e.g. examples (10) and (12)).

Bandele, for his part, does not, as I have shown earlier, attempt to create a myth of his own; rather, he cautions his friends about the dangers involved in creating such "myths" (page 178 of text). He is, however, mythologised by others in the text, who see him as a pillar of support; his patience and understanding nature make his friends, as well as Ayo Faseyi, turn to him for advice and guidance. For instance, Sagoe confides in him about his uneasiness with Sheikh ("... Sheikh set me off... It's this earnestness of his really, and one never quite knows what to do ... " - page 20). Furthermore, Bandele's patience makes Sagoe talk of him as being "superhuman" ("... One minute in the same house as Peter [Wall] is a trial. Bandele is quite superhuman" - page 196). In addition, Soyinka himself presents Bandele as a type of supernatural being towards the end of the text ("Bandele sat like a timeless image brooding over lesser beings" - page 244).

It is important to note that Soyinka portrays Bandele as a type of supernatural being from the point of view of the traditional Culture (Culture T): "And Bandele held himself unyielding, like the staff of Ogboni ["a conclave of elders, a kind of executive council to the throne" - Glossary in text, page 260], rigid in single casting" (page 244). For linked to this factor is the fact that it is Culture T itself that Bandele himself falls back on to exteriorise

his view of the Oguazors and company at Golder's Vacation Concert:

"'I hope you all live to bury your daughters'" (page 251)

There can be no doubt that the interpreters' attempts to create myths of their own do show how fertile their imagination is, how positively and creatively they are thinking - the implication being that they are moving in the right direction in their search for self-fulfilment. In spite of this factor, however, they are continually frustrated in the text: Egbo continually broods and thinks and talks in terms of drowning (pages 119-120); Bandele, whose patience has been emphasised in Part One of the novel ("Bandele wore his mask of infinite patience..." - page 42) becomes, towards the end of the novel increasingly irritable and more cynical than he has been hitherto: he now appears to Sagoe as sounding "'so fuckin' superior it would make a saint mad'" (page 178). Later, this attitude of Bandele's becomes even more pronounced after "Noah's" death ("...I expect Joe Golder has put years on me..." - page 244). As a result, he becomes "a total stranger" to Kola, Egbo and Sagoe ("'You will snap,'...very quietly from Kola" - page 244). It is not surprising, then, that Bandele should curse the group of guests at the Vacation Concert including Oguazor, Faseyi Lumoye and, significantly, Egbo in these terms: "'I hope you all live to bury your daughters'" (page 251). The fact that Egbo is one of the group whom Bandele curses underlines what we already know from the text : their major disagreement after which Egbo walks into the darkness (page 243) and, presumably, the final break between them.

The interpreters, especially Bandele, Egbo, Kola (and Sheikh), continue to be frustrated because their attempts to fulfil them-

themselves are constantly thwarted by certain problems, as the next section shows.

6.4 THE INABILITY OF THE INTERPRETERS TO ESCAPE FROM THE CREEK-SURFACE

6.4.1 The Oppressive Influence of Culture T

One reason for the inability of the interpreters to balance Cultures T and W against each other is that the "tyrannous energies" of Culture T (page 12) have a very big impact on their lives, especially on Egbo's life. From this point of view, elements of Culture T are not only still present in the cosmopolitan society depicted in the novel (it is in recognition of this fact that the interpreters slaughter a black ram to mark the opening of the posthumous exhibition of Sheikh's art works - page 243), but are still powerful enough to continue to disorientate the interpreters, to continue to make impositions on them: "... 'the dead should be better tucked away. They should not be interfered with because then they emerge to thrust terrifying dilemmas on the living. They have no business to make impositions on us'" (page 121). By "the dead" Egbo is referring to the ancestors ⁰ from whom the traditional Culture (Culture T) had originated in the first place. "The dead" is therefore synonymous with "the past": "... 'Is it so impossible to seal off the past and let it alone?....'" (page 121). By the same token, the present is also used as a synonym for the living.

'... Let the past stay in its harmless anachronistic unit so we can dip into it at will and leave it without impositions! A man needs that especially when the present equally futile,

distinguishes itself only by a particularly abject lack of courage.'

(page 121)

The phrase "the present" in the last sentence parallels "the living" in the first extract on the previous page.

It is clear from these extracts, especially from the last one, that what Egbo is opposed to is not so much that all memory of the dead should be effaced from one's consciousness but that it is the living who should have the advantage of manoeuvring the past and not the other way round. He makes this point explicit thus: "'...All choice must come from within him [the individual], not from promptings of his past'" (page 120). Thus, Egbo himself, as well as Kola, chooses (as I have pointed out above) to base his own "myth" on Culture T and, by extension, on the past probably because he finds it useful to do so. It is this type of freedom to choose that he is talking about here.

One way in which the dead continue to intrude into the present is to be found in the belief religiously entertained by the living that dead people should not be spoken of in uncomplimentary terms. Thus, when Dehinwa asks Sagoe, in the episode where they drive to the beach after leaving the Club Cambana in the early hours of the morning, to leave Sir Derinola alone since "'The man is dead'", Sagoe replies, "'Meaning I suppose, respect the dead?'" (page 33). Also, when Lasunwon describes the Sheikh's "Domes philosophy" as "'Gibberish, nothing but gibberish,'" Kola leaps up "shouting 'You vile-mouthed bastard!'" (page 163). But Egbo thinks otherwise: "...why not, why not. Why does he [Lasunwon] stop because the man is dead?" (pages 163-164).

The term the dead does not, however, simply refer to the past; more importantly, it also refers to elements of Culture T that are still present in the cosmopolitan society depicted in The Interpreters. The past, Egbo maintains with undiminished vehemence, "'should be dead. And I don't just mean bodily extinction. No, what I refer to is the existing fossil within society, the dead branches on a living tree, the dead runs on the bole....'" (page 120). The nature metaphors of "the dead branches on a living tree" and "the dead runs on the bole" describe how closely connected the dead and the past are to the living or the present. Since the branches are dead branches and since the runs are dead runs, it should be easy to cut them off without too much difficulty. But it is not only very difficult to do so, it is impossible: they have become fossils, have become hardened and have acquired the properties of a rock, which cannot be dislodged. So, the dead are making a stand in the present and making a big success out of it.

Furthermore, the extent to which tradition is still powerful in the society depicted in The Interpreters is also symbolically realised in the passage which describes the apala band that takes over playing, uninvited, at the Club Cambana after rain has forced the said high-life band to retire. The relevant passage is reproduced below and discussed in some detail in order to show how this symbolisation has been achieved in the text.

A new band took the stand, but they had not come to duel the rain(1). The small apala group had slowly begun to function as the string trio, quartet, or the lone violinist of the restaurants of Europe, serenaders

of the promising purse(2). This was an itinerant group, unfed; their livelihood would depend on alms(3). Normally their haunts were the streets, the markets and even private offices where they could practise a mild blackmail (4). They had a great nose for the occasion and were prepared for the naming-day before the child was born (5). They grew bolder, took in the urban needs, taught style to the new oyinbos, and became as indispensable to the cocktail party as the olive on a stick (6). First their tunes, then their instruments - the talking-drum especially - invaded the night-clubs(7). And later they re-formed, and once again intact, exploited intervals and other silences wrought by circumstance (8). As this group now did (9). Just the one box-guitar, three drums which seemed permanent outgrowths of the armpits, voices modulated as the muted slur by the drums' controlling strings (10). And they gauged the mood, like true professionals, speaking to each other, not to their audience, who would, if they chose, not know this language(11). But fashion had changed (12). Denial was now old-fashioned and after the garish, exhibitionist, bluff of the high-life band, this renewed a cause for feeling, hinted meanings of which they were, a phase before, half-ashamed(13).

(pages 20-21)

There are two issues which emerge clearly from this extract:

a) the desperate situation which the apala group are in, and their resourcefulness; and b) the developing attitude of the new African élite to traditional music and, by extension, to tradition in the society depicted in The Interpreters.

With respect to point (a) above, the apala band is presented as consisting of, in a way, a band of beggars: they are an itinerant group;

they are unfed or, more appropriately, they are under-nourished; and the money they get from playing is no more than alms (3). The fact that they are an itinerant group means that they go about playing in the streets, in the markets and even in offices, "where they could practise a mild blackmail"(4). The way in which they do this is suggested in sentences (5) and (6): they have an uncanny ability to collect information on almost everybody and on everything. The embarrassed official quickly gets rid of them by giving them some money. But the apala group also play uninvited at parties and in night-clubs and hotels.

The apala group being described in the extract in question is typical of apala groups in the society of the novel in general. This much becomes clear in Sentences (4-8) on the one hand, and (10) and (11) on the other. For instance, it is Sentence (9) that provides the clue that Sentences (4-8) describe apala bands in general. It does this by referring us back to the particular apala group being described in the extract. From this point of view, it is easy to see that the small apala band in (2) refers anaphorically to a new band in (1). We also know that the deitic This which begins (3) is also referring to the small apala band in (2). In this connection, "group" has been omitted after "this". When we get to (4), we initially take the pronominal items their and they as having anaphoric relationship with the small apala group, in (2). We go on in this belief until we get to Sentence (9): "As this group now did". It is only after reading this sentence that we become aware that Sentences (4-8) contain descriptions of apala groups in general, which include the particular apala group being discussed in the relevant passage. We then recognise.

that the pronominal items their and they (4), they (5), they (6), their ((2), S7) and they (8) are in fact referring not just to the specific apala group in question but to all apala groups in the society of the novel in general. In view of the foregoing, therefore, this group in (9) presupposes this (group) in Sentence (3), the small apala group (2) and a new band(1).

In (10), however, we return to the continued description of apala bands in general terms. The hint here is an oblique one. It is only in (11) that we begin to see again the use of non-specific pronouns: they and their, just as we have seen in (4-8). Sentence (9), however, serves a very useful purpose in the passage. For it is in it that we are reminded that the primary focus of attention in the extract currently under consideration is the particular apala band that is being described. But we are at the same time, being told that it is a typical apala band in the society of the novel.

One thing that emerges clearly from the description of the apala group in question is their resourcefulness; they are not going to give way to the new forms of music such as the high-life without a fight. Even in the unfamiliar setting of a society deeply under the influence of the Western Culture (Culture W), they are able to adapt their methods to the new situation: they "took in the urban needs, taught style to the new oyinbos [that is, the emerging African élite (see Chapter 5)], and became as indispensable to the cocktail party as the olive on a stick" (6). They have become indispensable in the sense that they have invaded intervals and silences so often and so relentlessly that they are to be expected at parties, in night-clubs, hotels and so on. In addition to their being tenacious, the various apala groups in the society of the novel also have the quality of resilience. For instance, they are able to take on the new Culture W and win - at least for the time being. Their resilience

is brought out clearly in Sentences (7) and (8): "First their tunes, then their instruments - the talking-drum especially - invaded the night-clubs (7). And later they re-formed, and once again intact, exploited intervals and other silences wrought by circumstance" (8). The use of and instead of the contrastive conjunction but makes it appear as if the re-grouping of the apala bands after the experience of disintegration which they have had is the most natural thing in the world.

Furthermore, their tunes and their instruments are presented here as animate beings acting of their own free will. Normally, in the clause system of English the term Actor typically refers to a human agent who is carrying out an activity at a particular point in time.⁶ And the lexical item invasion typically implies a human agent. In the case in question, however, the words tunes and instruments are presented as referring to animate or human beings acting of their own free will - acting, that is, independently of the people who normally play them: the apala band. Neither is it the high-life bands that introduced the tunes and the instruments of the apala bands into night-clubs as such. Rather, those tunes and instruments are cast in the mould of aggressors carrying the fight to their opponents. The initiative thus lies with tradition in this instance, the implication being that it is not only the Western Culture that is doing all the attacking; Culture T, too, is fighting back. And on this occasion, it is Culture T that emerges victorious. For instance, in the course of the attack mounted on night-clubs, apala music experiences disintegration to some extent; first, its tunes invaded the night-clubs, and then some of the instruments used to play it follow suit. But later, the apala bands become intact again and carry on with the attack on Culture W: they defiantly

⁶The terms "Actor", "Experiencer", "Affected" or "Goal" are used to describe participant roles in the clause within the system of transitivity. A clause may consist of only one participant, or two or three participants, depending on the nature of the experiential meaning it conveys. See, for instance, Quirk, et al (1974:349-54), Halliday (1973: 103 ff.) and Ure (1978:158 ff) for useful discussion of this issue.

go into offices, night-clubs and hotels to play, even though they have not been invited - thus carrying the fight to the forms of Western-oriented music played in the night-clubs and the hotels, especially to high-life music.

The fact that Culture T is able to put up such a stiff opposition to Culture W, as has been described above shows that although the Western Culture is a powerful force, the traditional Culture is powerful in its own right, too. And it is because the two Cultures are such potent forces that it is not possible for either of them to completely push the other to one side. They thus have to exist side by side whether they like it or not; but the relationship between them is an uneasy one, as a result of the fact that the values they stand for are constantly in conflict. This uneasy relationship is reflected in the lives of the people of the society depicted in the The Interpreters: they cannot do away with either Culture, since neither Culture W nor Culture T could achieve outright victory. The people concerned thus find themselves being constantly pulled in two directions at once. The result is that they ~~neither~~ completely belong to Culture W nor to Culture T. They are thus culturally ambiguous; and this factor has an unsettling effect on their lives.

For instance, with the coming of the Western Culture, there has emerged in the society of the novel a new form of music which uses exotic instruments such as the trumpet and the saxophone. This is high-life music (page 15 of text). But the various high-life bands in that society cannot play "pure" Western music, since the musicians involved have not been brought up in the Western tradition of music. Rather, it is the tradition of music such as apala that they have been born into.

So, the music they play would normally reflect aspects of traditional music whether they like it or not. In fact, the suggestion in the extract currently under consideration is that they incorporate forms of traditional music into their own brand of music more unconsciously than consciously. Thus, forms of traditional music - not just of apala music alone, it should be stressed - cannot completely die away. Not only that. They will also continue to make their presence felt in the emerging society.

It is for this reason that in the contrast between high-life music and apala music in the last sentence of the extract in question, it is apala music that emerges the stronger of the two. For instance, the high-life band portrayed in that extract are presented as bluffing exhibitionists who are using an attractive front to cover up a hollow centre. They are only pretending to be doing something new. It is because of the hollowness of this music that the patrons at the Club Cambana are not moved by it (Sentence (13)). Instead, it is the apala music that moves them, that evokes true feeling in them.

The deictic this in Sentence (13) presupposes this in (3). This is an instance of grammatical cohesion. In both cases, there is ellipsis,⁷ - the words apala and band having been omitted. So, the extract in question opens with direct references to a particular apala band or group (Sentences (1-3)). Then it goes from the particular to the

⁷ The notion of ellipsis has to do with empty structural slots which have to be filled from elsewhere in a given text in a given situation. From this point of view, ellipsis is synonymous with presupposition by substitution, the only difference being that in substitution, there is an explicit place-marker for what is presupposed. The most common of these place-markers are one and do. In ellipsis, however, the slot is left empty. Ellipsis can thus be regarded as substitution by zero. (See Halliday and Hasan (1976:142ff., especially 143.))

general in Sentences (4-8) to show that the apala band in question is typical of all apala bands in general. In Sentence (9), however, we are reminded that it is still the apala group referred to in (1-3) that is still the focus of attention in the relevant description. There is then a return to generalities. But the last sentence of the extract (13) again returns us to the particular apala group which is the main subject of the description in the extract. This observation is clinched by the fact that this is typically used in English to point to something or someone which/who is present in the relevant situational context. Furthermore, with the last sentence of the extract under discussion, we return to the continuation of the narration of the events taking place in the present of the Club Cambana scene to see the club atmosphere lighting up once more with human activity.

In addition, the resilience of apala music and, therefore, of tradition, is also hinted at in a short history of public attitudes to it. This is the second point raised a few pages back above. There was a time, the passage tells us, when people refused to acknowledge - publicly at least - apala music. There was a time they "would, if they chose, not know this language" (Sentence (11)). The term language as used here is ambiguous. On the one hand it could refer to the Yoruba language, since this is the language which the apala bands usually sing in, and since this is the other language apart from English that is used in The Interpreters. On the other hand, however, the word language is also used to refer to the type of music played by the apala band in question - and by apala bands in general for that matter. Music, after all, is a form of (self-) expression. The view that the

term language is also used to refer to music is reinforced by the use, again, of the deitic this, this time as a premodifier to language: "this language". This as has already been pointed out, is cohesively related to a new band (1) and the small apala group(2). So, we know that its referent is the apala group being described in the extract. It is therefore not difficult to extend the scope of that referent to include the music which that group plays as well. Doing this enables us to cope with this new occurrence of this. In view of the foregoing, then, language has been substituted for music. This is therefore a case of presupposition by substitution.

Although the people in the fictional world depicted in The Interpreters had previously - in the wake of the intrusion into that world of the alien Culture W - had a negative attitude to the basically traditional apala music, however, they have now been forced to change that negative attitude as a result of their discovering that it still has reality for them, in that it speaks a language which is able to rouse their emotions. High-life music, however, does not do this. Yet, the appeal of this new form of music is very strong - the belief probably being that it is superior in one way or the other to apala music and other forms of traditional music because it is played with exotic instruments. This is why it is high-life music that is played in night-clubs and hotels; the apala bands are merely tolerated, and reluctantly, too. That is also the reason why they have been left to fend for themselves the best way they know how.

It is not, however, only the resourcefulness of the apala bands that enables them to cope with the difficult problems of survival that confront them. Factors of nature also play a useful part in this

connection. For instance, the high-life band featured in the extract in question have been forced by the rain to stop playing and pack up their instruments. For example, the saxophone "slunk out of light, a wounded serpent diminishing in obscene hisses" (page 15) probably because rain water has got into it. It is described in terms of the serpent because of the resemblance in shape between it and the snake. The rain thus creates the silence which enables the apala group to take the stand and fill the Club Cambana with a new type of sound. (We have been told in the extract reproduced above that they exploit "intervals and other silences wrought by circumstance" (Sentence (8)). So, the rain is helping, albeit indirectly, the apala group by creating a chance for them to play.

The thematic significance of the foregoing is that the indigenous Culture T is still very much a part of the society portrayed in The Interpreters. It is still very strong despite the threat to its survival by the coming of the exotic Culture W. The extract which I have been discussing thus becomes symbolic of the fact that the society of the novel is in the "grips of a turbulent modernity" (Jones, 1973:163). The values manifested in Culture W are locked in perpetual combat with those manifested in Culture T and vice versa; and neither side shows any signs of surrendering. The resilience of apala music, then, is symbolic of the resilience of tradition in general; and this factor cannot simply be ignored. One effect of the potency of both Cultures T and W is that there is frustration on both sides from time to time. For instance, the feeling of frustration is clearly evident in the description of the way in which the high-life band stop playing: "The trumpet stabbed the night in one last defiant note, and the saxophone

slunk out of light, a wounded serpent diminsihing in obscene hisses"
(page 15).

As is the case with Sentence (7) in the extract which I have been considering, the aspect of Soyinka's mind-style which is manifested in the example above is that of participant relations in the transitivity system of English.⁸ The trumpet and the saxophone, like the tunes and the instruments of apala bands, are presented as animate beings who are able to act on their own volition: the trumpet "stabbed the night" in an act of defiance; and the saxophone "slunk out of light" as if by its own free will - its pride having obviously been wounded. The ugly hisses it emits are the water-tainted sound coming out of it. On the metaphorical level, however, the nature of the sound is indicative of frustration. There is thus a mixture of anger and frustration here; but the anger can only be directed at the night ("The trumped stabbed the night ..."). High-life music has not been able to make its mark, the suggestion being that it is still trying to come to terms with itself. On the one hand, it is not Western music in the real sense of the term. And on the other hand, it is also not traditional music either. It is simply dangling in space without a firm hold on anything. In other words, it needs to find itself. In this respect, it reflects the state of the society in which it is played: it is a society trying to come to terms with itself by struggling to come to terms with the modernity thrust upon it. There are tension and stress in that society, due mainly to the cultural ambiguity that has come to characterise it.

⁸ For an extensive treatment of the way in which mind-style is used to achieve local stylistic affects, see Leech and Short, 1981: 189ff).

It is interesting to note, though, that while the high-life band is not able to cope with the rain, the apala band is. For instance, later on in the larger episode in which the incident under consideration here is described, whenever rain water wets the drum skin, the lead drummer "retreated, rubbing it quickly, chafing it to restore its texture", and goes on playing as if nothing has happened (page 22 of text). This again demonstrates the resilient quality of apala music.

It is because of this enduring quality of apala music and, therefore, of tradition that Egbo is constantly aware of the "dark vitality" of tradition (page 12 of text),, its "virile essence " (page 11). The result of the society of the novel reeling under a turbulent modernity is that uncertainties pervade that society. This means that people are not always sure of what it is that is going on around them, which in turn makes it very difficult for them to develop appropriate responses to the events which they witness and participate in.

It can be seen from the foregoing that in spite of the massive disruption of narrative sequence in The Interpreters, the major themes of the novel have begun to appear very early in the text. The extract discussed above provides the first example in the novel of some main themes of the story being presented in a very small space - just one paragraph. In addition to the themes identified above, the theme of pretence and, therefore dishonesty, is also manifested in the relevant extract. This theme is first hinted at in Sentence (11) in the behaviour of audiences who pretended not to know anything about apala music, simply because it was thought more prestigious to listen and dance to high-life music; or to do the fox-trot, as Egbo does with Simi on the night of his sexual "campaign" in an Ib adan hotel (pages 55-56 of text); or to listen to ballet music at cocktail parties, as Professor

and Mrs Oguazor and their guests do (or, rather, pretend to do) in the second party scene in the novel (page 146). This pretentious disposition is heralded in the larger episode from which the extract discussed above has been taken. The manager of the Club Cambana pretends to be angry when the apala band begin to play. His real intention, however, is "...to test the reaction of his wealthier patrons. They waved at him to shut up and chuckling he went back behind the bar. Contentment lay in taking something for nothing" (page 21).

The manager is actually happy that the apala band are playing, for the vacuum left by the frustrated high-life band cannot be good for business. So, the apala band are actually helping to liven up the dull atmosphere at the Club, which has been created as a result of the unceremonious withdrawal of the high-life band from the stage. What is more, they are playing free of charge from the manager's point of view, as opposed to the high-life band who would normally have been contracted to play for a stipulated fee. This is the reason why the manager chuckles when his bluff succeeds and his wealthier patrons beckon to him to shut up. It must indeed be gratifying to take something for nothing.

The clearest indication of the way in which tradition makes impositions on the individual in the cosmopolitan society depicted in the text is to be found in the way Egbo is pestered by the Osa Descendants Union (their spokesmen "plague him daily" - page 12) and by the "Egbo Onosa" himself, who is his grandfather (he sends delegations "to feel him out" - page 119) to become the next "Egbo Onosa", even though he does not want to. For he feels that he is being made to carry the burden of his mother, the princess Egbo: "hers was the line of inheritance..." (page 12). His attempts to put the matter out of his mind fail constantly and he continues to be haunted by Osa and the "dark vitality" of tradition (page 12) throughout the text.

Egbo's point is that it is unrealistic for tradition to continue to make a stand the way it does in the new social situation in his society. This situation is that there is now a cosmopolitan society which contains within it elements of two Cultures (T and W) and not just of Culture T. Thus, the inward-looking, limited sort of society in which Culture T once flourished has now been replaced by a much more complex society, whose complexity derives from its diffuse nature:

... There was greater diffusion [in Lagos] in for instance the blaring gramophone which lined his [Egbo's] way to the office, in the senseless hoot of taxis, the curses of the irate traders and the haggler, in the bureaucratic replica of it all in files and minutes and diplomatic jargon.

(page 119).

In spite of the atmosphere of senselessness in the cosmopolitan society, however, it is the diffusion in it that makes it possible for the individual to experiment with ideas by amending or rejecting his earlier choices and conclusions in the light of new evidence, new experience. But this diffusion also exists in the cosmopolitan society because there are two basically different Cultures accounted for within it. One has to acknowledge this factor, however unpleasant it may appear to be, for it is then and only then that one could balance elements of both cultures meaningfully. To fail to recognise that elements of both are equally powerful in the social situation depicted in the novel is to be unrealistic about the issue. Thus, Osa is for Egbo "An interlude from reality" (page 10) precisely

because it does not reflect the crucial fact that elements of both Cultures T and W are equally powerful in the new social setting and that this is the reality of the social situation. Ironically, however, it is because the Osa Descendants Union want the creek-town to reflect the complex nature of the cosmopolitan society that they so badly want him to become the next "Egbo Onosa"; they have all been "bitten by the bug of an 'enlightened ruler'" (page 12) because they feel Egbo could transform the sleepy town ("Osa drowed in hard shadows and sun vapours ..." - page 10) into a bustling social (and commercial) centre. But Egbo fails to see this point. He only thinks of transforming the town in light-hearted terms: he is tempted by the opportunity to have a polygamous family, which the traditional rulership of Osa offers him; and he envisages that the many children he would have as a result would continue to keep the torch of the country's (that is, Nigeria's) traditions burning, thereby converting the world by example (page 14). It is not clear what Egbo means by "'By example to convert the world'", but taken in the context in which it occurs, it probably means that his visualised many children would convince other latter-day Nigerians to return to the "traditional fold" simply by the fact that they are descendants of a traditional ruler.

6.4.2. The Impossibility of Gaining a Sure Grasp of the Knowledge of the Mysteries of Life

The inability of the interpreters to balance Culture T and W is compounded by the fact that it is virtually impossible for them to gain a real grasp of the knowledge of the mysteries of life. For, since the knowledge they are seeking is the prerogative of the gods,

they cannot have it because they are human. And if they did have it, such knowledge would remove them from the human plane of existence. The first indication which we have in the novel that this is the case comes from the episode in which young Egbo spent a night of terror, in Past B, under the bridge at Olokemeji, in a brief passage where his thoughts are recorded:

^{He}
 left with a gift that he could not define upon
 his body, for what traveller beards the gods in their
 den and departs without a divine boon (1). Knowledge
 he called it, a power for beauty often, an awareness
 that led him dangerously towards a rocksalt psyche, a
 predator on Nature (2).
^{And}
 he made it his preserve, a place of pilgrimage(3).

(page 127)

Knowledge in (2) collocates with gift and boon in (1). This factor implies that the knowledge of the mysteries of life is a preserve of the gods and that they make bits of this knowledge available to favourites as they think fit. This line of interpretation is reinforced by the fact that Egbo cannot catch the essence of this knowledge ("He left with a gift that he could not define upon his body" (1); it is beyond his reach. For to gain such knowledge would be to trespass in the domain of the gods(2), which is a dangerous thing to do. Egbo thus realises, even at that early age in his life-he has just left secondary school ("And he, only after all a schoolboy, barely cleaned of the schoolfarm sod in his fingernails..." - page 123) - that knowledge of the mysteries of life can only be found in the domain of the gods and not in any human habitation. Thus, the fact that such a place is "no human habitation" (page 126) is not just an observation: it has the

illocutionary force of a warning,⁹ in that human beings are "predators on Nature" if they try to make such an abode their own and they must be ready to suffer the consequences of their foolishness. In this connection, it is important to stress that Egbo's "childhood ascent into the gods' domain" (page 126) took place amidst confusion, pain and terror (pages 125-126) and that it is this sense of confusion that haunts him throughout that part of his adult life which is represented in the text. This factor reinforces the inability of human beings to have a firm grasp of the understanding of the deeper meaning of life.

As a result, when Egbo remarks to the anonymous girl student, "'Who dares be adequate?'" (page 134), he is referring to adequacy in one's understanding of life. For instance, he makes it clear that he is not referring to academic knowledge. Thus, when the girl replies that it is necessary to be adequate, Egbo responds: "'Not even when you get your first-class honours....'" (page 134). He finally agrees with the girl that one at least needs to be "'wholly self-reliant'".

But self-reliance alone is not sufficient, for it does not endow one with the confidence with which to tackle the problems that confront one in life; it is mainly by gaining an understanding of the mysteries of life that one can gain that confidence. From this point of view, Kola's lack of the sureness of a capable artist ("I am not

⁹ The "illocutionary force" of an utterance has to do, in Speech Act Theory, with the interpersonal factor in a given discourse situation. Thus, an utterance does not only have a propositional content (that is, what the speaker is saying), it is also meant to have a particular effect on the listener, such as getting him to do something through a command, warning him, advising him, and so on. For a detailed treatment of these issues, see Searle (1969: 62ff).

really an artist. I never set out to be one...."- page 227) is not only to be seen in artistic terms alone, but also in terms of "the process of living":

Power... and Kola found he was thinking about what Egbo had said (1). For Egbo, saying it, made it sound almost like experience, and Kola had often felt from this point alone if for no other, that his role and Egbo's should be reversed (2). Fitfully, far too fitfully for definite realisation of the meaning, he had felt this sense of power, the knowledge of power within his hands, of the will to transform; and he understood then that medium was of little importance, that the act, on canvas or on human material was the process of living and brought him the intense fear of fulfilment (3). And this was another paradox, that he dared not, truly, be fulfilled(4). At his elbow was the invisible brake which drew him back from final transportation in the act(5).

(page 218)

Thus, Kola's inadequacy as an artist, which is contrasted with Sheikh's obvious artistic competence ("...Sekoni was an artist who had waited long to find himself but had done so finally, and left no room for doubt" - page 100), is a reflection of his lack of the confidence with which to go through life: "... the act, on canvas or on human material was the process of living...."(3). So, the fact that he has felt only fitfully, "far too fitfully for definite realisation of the meaning," the power to transform (3) is indicative of the fact that he has only caught fleeting glimpses of the knowledge of the mysteries of life. At the same time, however, Kola realises that "he dared

not, truly, be fulfilled" (4), for at "his elbow was an invisible brake which drew him back from final transportation in the act (5). It is also this invisible brake that draws the other interpreters back from a knowledge of their human condition, and which is responsible for their frustration, as it is plainly responsible for Kola's here.

The problem for the interpreters, then, is that the best they can ever hope for in life is an ambiguous position for, by trying to gain an understanding of life, they are simply moving from one plane of ambiguity (the cultural) on to another (the supernatural): they need to have the knowledge in question, but they can only have glimpses of it, for to have a firm grasp of it is to become a god. It means, then, that the interpreters are dangling between heaven and earth, not sure where to secure a footing.

From this point of view, Lazarus's portrayal in the Pantheon of the gods which, as I have noted earlier, is symbolic of the interpreters' efforts to rise on to a higher plane of thought, is also symbolic of the interpreters' frustration. For although it is true that the prophet is reaching out for a better understanding of life, it is also true that he is essentially a very confused man indeed. For instance, his resurrection is human, not divine. He himself indirectly alludes to this factor in the Church episode (pages 164-182) where he strives to make a distinction between himself and Christ: "'My name is Lazarus...not Christ, Son of God'" (page 164). He elaborates this point later by saying that although Christ raised himself from the dead, he, "'who was re-baptised Lazarus, the good Lord [or Christ the Father, as he puts it] raiseth from the dead'" (page 165). Thus, Lazarus wants to give the impression that in spite of his claimed unique experience of resurrection, he is

still very much a human being. But this is where the problem lies if he has once risen from the dead, he can no longer properly be called human; at the same time, however, he is not a supernatural being, as he himself takes care to point out. So, his is an ambiguous status, which is a reflection of the culturally ambiguous condition of the interpreters.

It is because Lazarus is still confused that he, too, like Kola ("I mistook the nature of his apostasy" - page 228), fails to realise the truth about "Noah". Here is a man who specialises in changing the nature of hardened criminals, whose group of Apostles is made up of thieves, a forger, a bank-robber, a murderer, and so on (pages 229-230). But he fails to change "Noah", the suggestion being that the boy is not even evil enough for his nature to be changed ("...Noah's apostasy is not the wilful kind, it is simply the refusal to be, the refusal to be a living thing..." - page 231).

Lazarus's failure is also, in a way, indicative of the superficiality of his attempt to escape the sabre-toothed jaws of the problems of existence by means of the delusion of a New Religion. He is powerful enough to "con" himself, to engage the curiosity of the interpreters, and to send his followers into real but ill-founded "religious" states of fervour and possession. From this point of view, the flames through which Lazarus has intended "Noah" to pass only "burnt from the surface of the pool" (page 223) and they only produce "flickering reflections" (page 222). The fact that they "burnt from the surface of the pool" thus reinforces the creek-surface motif in the text: in spite of his claim of resurrection, Lazarus is still operating on the creek-surface just like the interpreters.

In view of the foregoing, Lazarus's spiritual ambiguity is a reflection of the inability of the interpreters to gain a sure knowledge of the mysteries of life. In a wider sense, however, it is also symbolic of their cultural ambiguity: just as the prophet vacillates, figuratively speaking, between heaven and earth, between the human and the supernatural, so also do the friends neither completely belong to either Culture T or Culture W. As a result, their lives are characterised by instability, which is made even more unpleasant by the impositions made on them by Culture T.

From this point of view, Golder's confusion, which was discussed in Chapter 5 above, is symbolic of the interpreters' situation in a fundamental manner. For instance, his favourite Negro Spiritual, "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child" is indicative of what the interpreters are trying to do. For instance, as he sings the song at his Vacation Concert, Kola wishes that he and his friends were in fact motherless children:

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.... (1)

And so Kola looked at Bandele and he thought, if only we were, if only we were and we felt nothing of the enslaving cords, to drop from impersonal holes in the void and owe neither dead nor living nothing of our selves, and we should grow towards this, neither acknowledging nor weakening our will by understanding, so that when the present breaks over our heads, we quickly find a new law for living

(2). Like Egbo always and now, Bandele (3).

(pages 244-245)

There is a repeated example of ellipsis in the early part of Sentence (2): motherless children has been omitted after the repeated occurrence of were(2). That part of the sentence should therefore have read, "if only we were motherless children". The point about the

interpreters wanting to be motherless children is that they wish to be free of impositions, either from the dead (or the past) or from the present ("if only we felt nothing of the enslaving cords..." (2)). But they cannot break away from tradition nor from the historical past, since these two factors continue to have a big impact on their lives. In other words, they cannot be islands, not to talk of self-sufficient ones. They will have to complement their will with understanding of the basic issues of existence as they apply to them. The "new law for living" which Egbo always and Bandele on occasion find (3) can only be temporary measures, for these ad hoc laws cannot make for coherence in their lives.

It is because the understanding necessary for coherence and stability in the interpreters' lives is difficult to get hold of that Kola wishes that it would have been nice if it had been possible for them to do away with it altogether (3). Yet, they need to gain this understanding if they are to balance Cultures T and W against each other and gain a sense of certainty; for it is this understanding that would enable them to go beneath the break-surface and find depth.

This is, however, very difficult to accomplish in the situation of flux which exists in the society of the novel. So, the interpreters yearn for stillness. From this point of view, Egbo's childhood yearning for the dark, the still and the mysterious becomes indicative of the search for knowledge by all the interpreters. He himself explains this yearning of his in the following terms.

'... I truly yearned for the dark (1). I love life to be still, mysterious (2). I took my books down there to read, during the holidays (3). But later, I began to go further, down towards the old suspension bridge where the water ran freely, over rocks and

white sand(4). And there was sunshine (5).

There was depth also in that turbulence, at least I felt down into darkness from an unfettered sky (6). It was so different from the grove where depth swamped me; at the bridge, it was elusive, you had to pierce it, arrowed like a bird(7).

(page 9).

In this extract, the dark (1) and darkness (6) are synonymous with still and mysterious(2). They all then collocate with depth (6 and 7). From this point of view, Egbo's "wrung cries of his love-making" (page 127) with Simi - "... Good God, in darkness let me be... " (page 60) and " ...in darkness let me lie... in darkness cry" (page 127) - is to be seen in terms of his search for depth, his attempt to unmask anything mysterious and pin down the elusive (he "did not hesitate to pursue the elusive" - pages 218-219). This line of interpretation is reinforced by our realisation that it is Egbo's first love -making session with Simi, which is his first, that heralds his "childhood ascent into the gods' domain" (page 126) and, therefore, into the world of the mysterious ("...Why not Simi to initiate him once and thoroughly into his part in the life mysteries ? " - page 56); and that Simi herself is cast in the mould of the mysterious: none of the men who patronise her really understand her ("...Simi was cast in the mould of distance, and it made her innocent" - page 54). In addition, Egbo's connection with mystery is further reinforced by the fact that there is an atmosphere of mystery about the girl student whom he seduces: he neither knows her name (page 157) nor anything about her, except that she is an undergraduate (" ...he had not fully taken from her or given in turn, for she held herself like a goddess so that they fell apart, strangers"- page 235).

In view of the foregoing, the love-making motif is in The Interpreters used to serve an important thematic function: that of initiating Egbo into manhood and the world of the gods and, therefore, the mysterious, and not to underline his callousness to women, as Palmer (1979:246) suggests.

The interpreters, then, are looking for stillness in the atmosphere of flux that pervades their society, the suggestion being that ideally, it is when life stands still that they can go about their search for certainty with confidence, it is in stillness that they can hope to find depth (6). It is also to this factor that Kola alludes much later in the novel when he, Sagoe and Egbo begin to find it increasingly difficult to understand Bandele's behaviour:

And Kola, who tried to see it all, who tried to clarify the pieces within the accommodating habit of time, felt, much later, in a well-ordered and tranquil moment, that it was a moment of frustration, that what was lacking that night [of the Vacation Concert] was the power to shake out events one by one, to space them in intervening standstills of the period of creation.

(page 244)

In this extract, Kola wishes that time would stand still so that he could clarify his thoughts with regard to the problems of existence with which he and his friends are confronted. But he knows, and the other interpreters as well as the reader know, that this cannot be the case. Life must go on, and this factor compounds their problems. For the fact of time in flux will always make certainty elude them. In addition, "the power to shake out events one by one", which Kola lacks, is enough understanding of life which, as I have stated, is only

properly available to the gods.

The sense of frustration felt by the interpreters is summed up by Egbo through his repeated use of the drowning motif in the text. He constantly uses the metaphor of drowning to indicate his ever-present confusion and frustration at not being able to pin down the elusive and mysterious: he sees himself confronted by "a question of drowning" which, for him, is "resolving itself always only into a choice of drowning..." (page 120). He has developed this metaphor of drowning out of his experience of the nature of his father's life and of the manner of his death, which was by drowning. This was a man who moved among the settlements in the creeks in a dug-out, preaching the Word of God, "a Word which in spite of ritual acceptance altered little..." (page 12). From this point of view, therefore, Egbo's father moved both literally and figuratively on the creek-surface all his adult life - figuratively in the sense that he achieved nothing significant. Thus, although his father ended, literally, at the bottom of the creek, he did not find depth in figurative terms, with the result that his death can only be accounted for on the creek-surface. In this connection, Egbo's father's failure thus becomes symbolic, for Egbo, of his own inability to find depth and certainty, hence his constant use of the metaphor of drowning in the novel. His own life consists in moving on the creek-surface (page 13), "'With the tide,'" (page 14), without his ever being able to find depth; instead, he can only expect to drown at the bottom of the creek. Kola, too, stands near Simi in confusion at the end of the novel, not knowing what to do or which way to turn next (page 251).

The supreme example of frustration in The Interpreters is to be found in Sheikh's brief but disastrous flirtation with the Civil Service (pages 26-31 of text). The stage for this disaster is set, linguistically, through the juxtaposition of the passage in which the engineer's idealistic dreams of transforming his society into a technological wonder (pages 26-27) is described and of that describing the mundane jobs he is given to do in his air-conditioned office ("If you'd just look over these applications for leave and put up a roster...." - page 27). The language of the former passage is metaphor-laden ("...And the sea sprays built him bridges and hospitals...." page 26), while that of the latter is couched in the form of ordinary, everyday use of language ("In here. Let me know if there is anything else you need...." - page 27). The distinction being made here is between idealism and reality: Sheikh's fate is thus symbolic of that of the other interpreters, with the possible exception of Sagoe who is, by the time the novel ends, at the point of settling down into a stable relationship with his "childhood sweetheart" (page 71) Dehinwa ("I am trapped [into marriage].... Trapped and I love it" - page 240).

6.5 CONCLUSION

The dilemma of the interpreters, then, is that in trying to break out of their creek-surface existence they are simply entangling themselves in yet another ambiguous situation: that of humans aspiring to embody a quality of the gods - knowledge of the mysteries of life. Yet this is the only sure way to certainty and depth, the other alternative being to continue moving with the tide on the creek-surface and

end up being either a black oyinbo or a Negritudinist, both of which positions are invitations to mental death. The suggestion that emerges from The Interpreters , then, is that the only way to go through life in any meaningful manner is to stand up to the challenges of life. And although the individual's capacity to cope adequately with these challenges is severely limited, he should try to be mentally active in a positive direction so as to at least recognise that certain problems exist.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We have now seen that in spite of the structural eccentricities manifested in The Interpreters, the novel is coherent as literary text. This coherence has been effected by the use of certain recurrent motifs in the text. For instance, the filth motif has the effect of underlining the futility of the fictional world depicted in the novel (Chapters 3,4 and 5). Linked to this motif are the living death and the black oyinbo motifs and, consequently, the creek-surface motif (Chapter 5). All these motifs are used to expose the futile existence of the politicians and the Board members in the society of the novel on the one hand, and of the intellectuals on the other. Furthermore, the creek-surface motif is also linked to the motifs of apostasy, darkness and floods to indicate the (pre-creation) confusion and frustration of the interpreters (Chapter 6). In addition, the darkness motif is also linked to the depth motif to show what the interpreters are trying to achieve in the text: a firm grasp of the knowledge of the mysteries of life.

One linguistic implication of the use of all these motifs is that threads of continuity are woven throughout the novel by certain lexical motifs which would normally not enter into the same similarity chain but which do so in The Interpreters from the point of view of Soyinka's communicative intention. As a result, filth-related lexical items such as garbage heaps, slop, (polluted) water, stagnant, clogged, turds, decomposing, smell, stench, Isale-Eko, slum and slums collocate, from the point of view of the themes of the novel, with such items as dripping, petrified (brains), creek-surface, death and plastic apples

in that they have all been used to characterise the futility of the society depicted in the text. Similarly, the items creek-surface, darkness and apostasy which do not normally collocate in English also belong in the same similarity chain: they all describe the confusion and frustration of the interpreters.

In view of the foregoing, the similarity chains which emerge from The Interpreters are those whose members are linked by "a similarity of interpersonal meanings" (Hasan, Mimeo, 1978:6). Chains of this type are therefore "interpersonal similarity chain"(ISC), as opposed to the other type which are called experiential similarity chain (ESC)" (Ibid., page 7). Interpersonal similarity chains are typically made up of those lexical items which express a speaker's or writer's attitude to his subject-matter. Thus, such items may not be related in the linguistic system, but will be related in the text, literary or non-literary. This is one area where the concept of cohesion could be meaningfully extended to the study of literary texts.

From the point of view of the foregoing, the lexical items which I have set out above fall into two main divisions: a) the set which indicates the futility of the society of the novel expresses Soyinka's negative attitude to the characters concerned and b) the set which describes the frustration of the interpreters expresses his positive attitude to other characters. In this connection, the lexical items darkness, still and depth constitute another interpersonal similarity chain in the text; and they reinforce the "frustration" set : the interpreters are trying to evolve a sense of order amidst the confusion that is continually threatening to choke them.

It is not only lexical items that enter into these interpersonal similarity chains, however, for metaphoric and symbolic cohesion is

also manifested in the novel. Thus, it is not only the lexical items petrified, death and dripping that enter into the chains but the metaphors of "petrified senses", petrified brains" and "dripping paint" on the one hand, and of "house of death", "house of deaths" and "Oguazor's Cemetery" on the other. Furthermore, Lazarus and Joe Golder are, in symbolic terms, related to each other and to the interpreters in that they manifest spiritual and racial ambiguity respectively; both types of ambiguity are, in turn, symbolic of the interpreters' cultural ambiguity. We can therefore group them together with the interpreters in the same interpersonal similarity chain. In addition, the words darkness and blackness also indicate Golder's confusion.¹

In view of the foregoing, then, we may conclude that the coherence of The Interpreters as text has been achieved through the cohesive force of certain lexical items as well as certain foregrounded motifs and metaphors (see Leech, 1970:123-128). The reason for this is, as has been stated in Chapter 1, that a literary text is a compound of linguistic and literary (or artistic) features.

That is why, as I have shown in this thesis, a consideration of the linguistic realisation of theme in The Interpreters has to take place within the framework of the structural design of the novel. It is by doing this that I have been able to arrive at the conclusions which I have reached in the thesis, namely, that the fictional world represented in the text is characterised by a pervasive atmosphere of disorientation, as a result of which factor the interpreters have become culturally ambiguous. In trying to find a way out of this

¹ There is a breakdown of the pattern of coherence identified in The Interpreters in Appendix II.

state of uncertainty, they discover that it is necessary to be mentally active in a positive direction, a quality of mind which the satirised characters lack. Since their society has lost all sense of direction, they resort to creating private myths of their own; but this factor fails to prevent them from being constantly frustrated and confused, especially since the knowledge they seek is out of reach of mortals. So, in spite of the disruptive effect of the time-shuttling device used in the text on the structure of the novel, the coherence of the story told in The Interpreters is enhanced by the cohesive force of certain lexical items and certain foregrounded motifs in the novel.

In the light of the discussion so far in this concluding section of the thesis, certain remarks made about Soyinka's language in the text by Eldred Jones in his Introduction to the 1978 impression of The Interpreters need to be discussed briefly so as to put the issue in proper perspective.

He talks, for instance, of Soyinka's "cryptic, image-laden style" (page 1), of his "sensitive use of imagery throughout" (page 4), without mentioning whether these aspects of the author's use of language contribute anything to the development of the story told in the text. Furthermore, there is nothing unique in Soyinka's use of metaphors "to fuse two images together..." (page 5), since metaphors tend to have this effect. In addition, Jones's statement, that "...Soyinka by the short cut of metaphor imprisons features, ideas, and personalities in a brief phrase" (page 5) is not entirely accurate. For a metaphor is not, as we have seen in the discussion of the metaphors of "house of death", "petrified brains" and "living death" (Chapter 5), a kind of abbreviation in that "A potent metaphor does not abbreviate its paraphrase; it

generates it" (Cohen, 1976: 251). Thus, "an individual metaphorical statement may support endless paraphrase" (Ibid., page 250).

Also it is not clear what exactly Jones means by "Soyinka's allusive style" (page 6). He probably has in mind the author's description of the first love-making session between Egbo and Simi ("... And a lone pod strode the baobab on the tapering thigh, leaf-shorn...." - Page 60 of text). For, as he himself explains, "Soyinka avoids either obviousness or prurience in his description of Egbo's first sexual encounter with Simi by portraying the episode through poetic imagery...." (page 5). But again, he fails to say what thematic significance, if any, attaches to this aspect of Soyinka's style in The Interpreters.

The implication of all this is that although Soyinka's command of the English Language is not in doubt, he does not always use it in a thematically disciplined manner in the text. Thus, in spite of the fact that certain metaphoric uses of language draw attention to themselves in the novel, these are not treated as foregrounded since they do not constitute instances of thematically motivated prominence. This observation reinforces a point made in Chapter 1 of this thesis, namely, that linguistic patterns acquire significance in a literary text by virtue of the part they play in clarifying the communicative purpose of the relevant author. In view of this factor, it is only those linguistic patterns which have been found to be of a major thematic significance in The Interpreters that have been discussed. That is why many metaphors in the novel have not been ⁿconsidered in this thesis.

In addition to the foregoing, it should also be clear that this study of The Interpreters has certain pedagogical implications. First, in order to teach a literary text to any class successfully, the teacher

of literature should himself be able to distinguish thematically motivated linguistic and literary patterns in the relevant text from incidental or even redundant ones. Secondly, the teacher's interpretative efforts will be enriched if he pays close attention to the language used in the literary texts he teaches in a linguistically disciplined manner. And thirdly, it is the methods of literary stylistics that afford him the best tools with which to do this.

Finally in this thesis, there is the further need for literary stylisticians to investigate in greater detail specific ways in which the linguistic notion of cohesion could be profitably extended to the study of literary texts. For this, as was suggested in Chapter 1 and as was implied in certain parts of this study (for example, Chapters 3, 6 and earlier in this section of the thesis), is one area where a very useful relationship could be forged between linguistics and literary criticism.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: TIME-SCALE IN THE INTERPRETERS

P A S T B		P A S T A		P R E S E N T	
Page	E V E N T	Page	E V E N T	Page	E V E N T
16	1. Death of 'Egbo's parents and his own rescue from the same accident.	89	1. Bandele, Kola and Egbo the first among the interpreters to return to Nigeria from abroad.	7-8; 14-16; & 17-26	1. The Club Cambana (opening) episode.
10	2. Egbo presented to his grandfather, the Egbo Onosa.	26-27; 27-31	2. Sheikh's return from abroad, his brief flirtation with the Civil Service and his eventual madness.	31-39	2. The interpreters leave the club; the visit by Dehinwa's mother and aunt.
16-17	3. Egbo's harsh treatment by his first and second guardians.	8-14	3. The visit to Osa by Egbo, Bandele, Kola and Sheikh.	61-64, 66-68 & 103-107	3. More information about Sagoe's relationship with Dehinwa revealed.
222	4. Egbo's first glimpse of the sea.	89-107	4. Sagoe's return home from abroad three months after Sheikh had returned.	63-66, 68	4. Sagoe's hangover and hallucination later the same morning as the Club Cambana scene.
246	5. Egbo and friends playing in a dyers' compound.	72-82	5. Sagoe attends and interview for a job in the board-room of the "Independent Viewpoint".	107-113	5. Sagoe goes to attend Sir Derinola's funeral; the meeting with the "boot-coffiners" and Lazarus.

P A S T B		P A S T A		P R E S E N T	
Page	E V E N T	Page	E V E N T	Page	E V E N T
87-89	6.(a) Sunday School days of Egbo, Sagoe and Dehinwa. (b) Beginnings of Sagoes obsession with farting, castor oil and, consequently "shit".	83-87; 90-93	6. Chief Winsala's visit to Sagoe and his subsequent disgrace two days after the interview that never was.	113-119	6. Two weeks later, Sagoe witnesses "Barabbas" being chased and meets Lazarus for the second time.
17;51-52	7.Egbo in boarding(secondary) school.	93	7. Sagoe gets the job for which he has applied the morning after Chief Winsala's visit.	119-123	7. Four of the interpreters meet in Bandele's house in Ibadan; Egbo brooding as usual; Egbo meets the anonymous girl student.
50-51	8.Simi introduced to the reader.	69-72	8. Sagoe's first day at the office.	127-134	8. Egbo takes the girl student to his "retreat" and has sex with her there.
52	9.Egbo's last few days at secondary school and his first glimpse of Simi.	31;98-99 &99-103	9. Sheikh's stay in a mental hospital and his uneasy relationship with his father.	135-139	9. Sagoe meets Peter Wall at Bandele's house and then goes, uninvited, with Bandele to the Oguazors' party.

P A S T B		P A S T A		P R E S E N T	
Page	E V E N T	Page	E V E N T	page	E V E N T
53-60; 123-124	10. Egbo leaves school; his first sexual encounter with Simi and his night of pleasure and pain.	93-96	10. Nwabuzor's rejection of Sagoe's article on the cruel treatment of Sheikh by his bosses.	139-152	10. The Oguazors' party episode.
125-127	11. Immediate after-effects of the encounter referred to above.	99-103	11. Sheikh's pilgrimage to Old Jerusalem, his cure and his masterpiece; Joe Golder trying to be black.	183-201	11. Sagoe meets Golder for the first time.
98-217	12. Sheikh's marriage to a Christian girl mentioned.	108	12. The incident of the overturned night-cart and trailer at Abule-Ijesha about a month before the story of <u>The Interpreters</u> opens in the present.	155-164	12. Sheikh's death in a car crash; Egbo, Bandede and Kola (as well as Dehinwa and Lasunwon) meet Lazarus for the first time; Sagoe for the third time.
98	13. Denunciation of Sheikh by his father, Alhaji Sekoni.	39-47	13. The Embassy reception & Kola's first meeting with Monica Faseyi.	164-182	13. The (Lazarus) Church Episode.

P A S T B		P A S T A		P R E S E N T	
Page	E V E N T	Page	E V E N T	Page	E V E N T
219	14. The fight which later provides for Sheik the inspiration for "The Wrestler".	47-50	14. Kola and Bandele visit the Faseyis' house for lunch the following afternoon.	220-222; 222-224	14. Kola and Egbo get lost briefly in the July floods later the same day; "Noah" fails the test of ordeal by fire.
		106	15. Sagoe and Dehinwa visit her grandmother at Ifo.	201-214	15. Egbo, Bandele and Kola have lunch at the Faseyis'.
				214-218	16. Golder's homosexuality highlighted.
				224-234	17. Kola's painting of the Pantheon coming to an end; after 15 months; his deepening affection for Monica; the "night of severance".
				234-238	18. "Noah's" death and the interpreters' reaction to it.
				238-246; 247-251	19. Golder's after-tragedy recital; Egbo's deepening confusion; end of novel.

NOTE. My aim in this Appendix is to give the reader of this thesis an idea of the way in which the major events described in The Interpreters thematically relate to each other in spatiotemporal terms, as opposed to their sequential ordering in the novel. This task has not been an easy one, for two main reasons: a) the total lack of temporal clues in certain parts of the novel; and b) the structural discrepancy discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis. With respect to (a), there is no indication at all in The Interpreters as to the narrative time in which some of the recorded incidents happen. For instance, the incidents recorded at nos. (13-15) in column 2 in the Table above have been put together at the end because it has not been possible for me to ascertain from the novel when exactly they did take place in Past A. And with regard to (b) above, I have arranged the events summarised at (11-14) in the column under "Present" according - as far as I can deduce from The Interpreters - to the order in which they are likely to have happened in the fictional world represented in the novel.

Each column in the Table is to be read from beginning to end first before being related to the other columns so as to see what happens in Past B, in Past A and in the Present first before relating the events recorded in one column to those in the other columns.

The incidents recorded at nos. (1-6) in the column under "Past B" relate to Egbo's childhood and, to a lesser extent, Sagoe's and Dehinwa's. And in the column under "Present", the incidents recorded at nos. (1-10) are accounted for in Part One of The Interpreters while those at (11-19) belong to Part Two.

APPENDIX II

PATTERN OF COHERENCE EMERGING FROM THE INTERPRETERS

NOTE 1 The analysis set out below have only been done at the first degree of delicacy, since my aim in this Appendix is simply to present a general picture of the way in which the various parts of The Interpreters cohere. I have therefore not gone into details with respect to the various kinds of cohesive tie that operate in English.

A. NETWORK OF MOTIFS

1. The Satirised Characters: Chief Winsala, Sir Derinola, the Managing Director, the Chairman of the Board of Sheikh's Ministry, Professor J.D. Oguazor, Mrs Caroline Oguazor and Joe Golder

Motif	Relevant Chapter in Thesis	Theme Realised
<p>Filth</p> <p>Voidancy philosophy</p> <p>Living death</p> <p>Petrified brain flower Forest</p> <p>Dripping oil</p> <p>Plastic apples/Plastic fruit decorations</p> <p>Black oyinbo</p>	<p>3,4 } 4</p> <p>5</p>	<p>Irresponsibility and civic inadequacy of the Board members of the "Independent Viewpoint", of the Chairman of the Board of Sheikh's Ministry and, consequently, of the irresponsibility and civic inadequacy of politicians, especially Ministers.</p> <p>(See nos. (2), (5), (6), (7) and (10) under "Past A" in Appendix I, and also no.(5)under "Present".</p> <p>Lack of imagination of the Oguazors and, consequently, their inability to think critically in a positive direction as well as their confusion. (See nos. (10) and (19) under "Present" in Appendix I.)</p>

Motif	Relevant Chapter in Thesis	Theme Realised
Running paint Negritude Darkness	5	Joe Golder's inability to think critically and his confused state of mind. (See nos. (11), (16), (18) and (19) under "Present" in Appendix 1.)

2. The Interpreters: Egbo, Sagoe, Bandele, Kola and Sheikh

Motif	Relevant Chapter in Thesis	Theme Realised
a Creation Pantheon Depth Darkness Stillness (Egbo's) love-making (with Simi)	6	<p>The interpreters' attempts to escape from their creek-surface existence. The depth motif also symbolises the friends' ultimate goal in life, which is to pin down the elusive, but which proves unattainable in the novel. (See no. (17) under "Present" in Appendix I.)</p>
b Creek-surface Apostasy Floods Darkness Drowning Melting-pot	6	<p>The (pre-creation) confusion of the interpreters (see nos. (10) and (11) under "Past B" in Appendix I, and also nos. (7), (12), (14), (17), (18) and (19) under "Present").</p>

NOTE 2 It will be noticed that the darkness motif is used in The Interpreters to underline the confusion of Joe Golder and that of the interpreters; and that it also symbolises, for Egbo at least, a possible atmosphere in which depth could be located. The motif is thus very complex indeed.

NOTE 3 One linguistic implication of the foregoing is that certain lexical items as well as certain metaphors and symbolic motifs which would not normally "collocate" in English do so in The Interpreters. On the one hand, therefore, items belonging to the "filth" set collocate, thematically, with those in the "politics" set, and both groups of items in turn collocate with those in the "death" set. On the other hand, certain lexical items used to describe the confusion of the interpreters as well as their search also collocate from the thematic point of view in the novel.

B. NETWORK OF LEXICAL ITEMS THEMATICALLY COLLOCATING IN THE INTERPRETERS

1. In relation to the Satirised Characters

"Filth" set		"Politics" Set		"Death" set	
Page	Item	Page	Item	Page	Item
72-73	slums, Isale-Eko, garbage heaps, slop, slum, rotten stagnant, clogged, (2), turds, decomposing, stench, smell (2), filth, greasy (water), black and white, powder and grime, bilge-water, squelch, lagoon, piano-key armpits; urine, caked, unflushed, smears;	72-73	party, organ(pure)political (strategy), thugs, paper(2), "Independent Viewpoint"; thug recruitment, Ministerial inlawfulness, Ministerial poncing, arse-licking, Ministerial concubinage; used.	21	(a) (the) new oyinbos
76	carcass, swelled, greasy (globules of the skin), putrefaction, burst, ruptured (throat); running shit;	77		111	{ (the) new black oyinbos, colonial vacuity,
79	fouling, soot-glazed, fouled, messes of oil...., squelching, (a) dead (goat) distended, stink, puddles, clogging, rotted, slopping water, bilge-water, decayed.	94		149	{ (this) new black élite, (the) asses;
108				139	house of death;
220-				148	house of deaths;
222				206	Oguazor's Cemetery;
				63	petrified flowers;
				110	petrified flower;
				140	Petrified Forest, petrified brains
				148	brains, petrified;
				110	dead flower;
				63	frozen (senses);
				62	dripping
				148	
				140	plastic fruits, plastic, plastic lichen
				149	plastic apple;
				195	(b)
				217	black;
				217	blackness;
				246	negritude;
				34	voidante pseudo-negritudinists
				107	
				97	

NOTE 4 The single line linking the boxes containing the lexical items in the "filth" and "politics" sets shows that the items in the one collocate with those in the other. The two boxes so linked are then enclosed within a larger box which is then linked by an arrow to the box containing the items in the "death" set.

2. In relation to The Interpreters

(a) The Interpreters' confusion

Page	Item
13	creek-surface (2);
13, 177, } (2), 228, } 231	apostasy;
13(2), } 177(3), } 178, 231	apostate;
220-224	floods;
221	dark;
243	darkness;
120	(a) question of drowning;
120 } 251(2)}	(a) choice of drowning.

(b) The Interpreters' attempts to create order

Page	Item
9	darkness, still, mysterious
120	depth (2);
120	(the) core;
9 } 218- } 219 }	elude;
123	(the) elusive;
232	rise
	rising, light, rainbow.

NOTE 5 All the motifs referred to in the first section of this Appendix can also be seen as metaphors and symbolic motifs (e.g. the metaphorical use of floods in the novel). The said motifs have not been listed under a separate heading (e.g. "Network of Metaphors, etc.") in order to avoid unnecessary repetition.

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